

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor

Ghosts of Collective Trauma:
Magical Realism and Its Cultural Alterations

by

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July 2016

권보드래 지도교수
박 사 학 위 논 문

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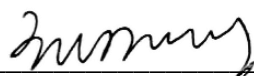
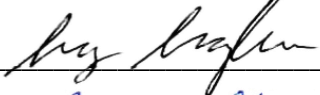
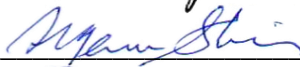
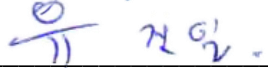
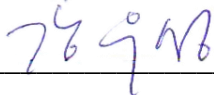
2016 년 7 월 7 일

고려대학교 대학원
비교문학 비교문화 협동과정학과

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Approved by the committee of the Graduate School of Korea University,
Program of Comparative Literature and Comparative Culture, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I. Introduction

Portraying different kinds of trauma has been undeniably one of the most frequent topics of literary works. Still, only since the end of the nineties has the use of trauma studies in literary criticism gained popularity; especially concerning war trauma, the holocaust, and the literature of post-communist and post-colonial countries. Furthermore, recently trauma as a framework of interpretation has become widely used in gender studies, too, and the trauma of battered women and abused children have become a focus of attention with the strengthening of the women's movement as well.

Alongside this interest of literary studies in trauma, it can be observed that trauma has a central importance in contemporary culture, too: mass media, as well as popular culture, seems obsessed with repeatedly showing traumatic events, and there is also a "preoccupation with family dysfunctions—child abuse, incest, spousal abuse—in the media, most strikingly on the talk show circuit" (Berger 571). Moreover, the history of the twentieth century has been rich in traumatic events. The two World Wars have re-shaped our understanding of warfare, while the invention of the nuclear bomb has completely changed the possible dangers of a new war. The Nazi death camps have traumatized generations to come, and completely changed how humans can think about

themselves and humanity as such while also destroying forever the belief in a right, just and logical world. The Cold War, Vietnam, Iraq, the collapse of the twin towers: the Western world seems to live in a constant anticipation of danger since the First World War.

The history of Hungary in the twentieth century has also been abundant with traumatic events. After being defeated in both World Wars and losing two-thirds of its territory, Hungary became part of the Soviet Union against its will, and had to struggle for its freedom until 1990. Meanwhile, though Korea has gained independence after the Second World War, the Korean War disunited the country, causing constant tension up until now. As Cumings observes in his introduction to Korean short stories all centering around trauma: “[n]ow that South Koreans are free to write about this war ..., we can see that an entire population was traumatized by one of the most violent and intense wars of the twentieth century” (ix). Even after the Korean War, the different military regimes and the so-called Gwangju Massacre in 1980 provide ample material for writings on trauma, still very much present in Korean contemporary fiction. Indeed, as Caruth suggests, our “catastrophic age” is an age in which trauma can “provide the very link between cultures” (“Foreword” 11).

One narrative mode or strategy that is employed by several authors while writing about historical trauma is magical realism, which will be dealt

with in detail in the second chapter. Although it is a highly debated and overused term, which many writers have refused regarding their works, for the purpose of this paper, that is, in order to illuminate the underlying similarities between the three narratives, it offers a fruitful approach. First of all, in all three texts there are ghosts engendered by historical trauma, whose paradoxical presence is accepted by the communities as natural. These ghosts all embody the repressed (or dissociated) past and their haunting is intertwined with the haunting quality of traumatic memory. Also, by trying to represent the verbally unrepresentable, magical realism has similar aims to that of trauma narratives. Although trauma cannot be completely verbalized nor comprehended, by means of the supernatural elements its evasive nature can be portrayed quite effectively. In addition, several critics¹ mention the possibility of a cultural healing (where healing means enabling different alternatives for the future by means of discussing and remembering the silenced and/or repressed past) or rather commemoration, initiated by magical realist texts, which again characterizes trauma narratives as well. Therefore, there are some underlying similarities between works concerning trauma and magical realist texts, and one of the aims of this dissertation is to observe the reason behind these similarities. In addition, it intends to show how these characteristics are applied in all three works, written in highly different cultural and historical contexts.

¹ See the works Wendy B. Faris, Taner Can, and Maggie Ann Bowers, among others.

Thus, this dissertation plans to analyze and compare an African American, a Korean, and a Hungarian narrative, each concentrating on both individual and collective trauma and each authors using the techniques of magical realism in these works. It is important to note that none of the writers write exclusively magical realist texts; rather, they have made a conscious decision to use the narrative mode in these particular works. As this dissertation suggests, there is a reason why magical realism is especially appropriate for trauma narratives. The three works discussed are *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Guest* (2001) by Hwang Sok-yong and *Welcome* (2005) by Krisztián Grecsó.

In Morrison's case, the trauma pervading all her novels, whether they are set in the seventeenth, nineteenth or the twentieth century, is the collective memory of slavery. In all her works she focuses on “the damaging impact of white racist practices and learned cultural shame on the collective African-American experience”, showing how it takes part “in the construction of African-American identities as racially inferior and stigmatized” (Bouson 4). Her agenda is, as Bouson points out, to “bear witness to the shame and trauma” in the life of African-Americans, while also trying to provide “a cultural cure both through the artistic rendering and narrative reconstruction of the shame and trauma story and also through the fictional invocation of the protective

power of the black folk community and the timeless ancestor figures” (5). Thus, ultimately her aim is to remember the past for the sake of the community’s future, which is also the design of Hwang Sok-yong in *The Guest*.

As mentioned above, the Korean War is an event that influenced the collective identity of all Koreans by dividing the country into two opposing forces. Hwang’s novel concentrates on the reasons behind this division: foreign influence, namely Christianity and Marxism, are shown as threats to the identity of people. After committing horrible atrocities in the name of these two ‘guests’, the survivors of the massacre all have to bear their experience of collective trauma, and as Hwang points out in his introduction, “[t]he scars of our war and the ghosts of the Cold War still mar the Korean peninsula” (9), just like the distant memory of slavery still haunts African Americans as well as the whole United States, or the Holocaust still haunts all of Europe. Thus, Hwang literally portrays ghosts in his novel, who are the spirits of people unjustly killed but at the same time symbols of the wounds of the civil war as well. He uses a shamanic healing ritual to facilitate the reconciliation between the living and the dead, and through remembering and reliving the horrible memories of the massacre the people involved can finally face the traumatic events and their part in it without the false rhetoric of either side’s official narrative of the war. By

admitting their crimes and offering and receiving forgiveness, the characters can either rest in peace or continue living, facing the future instead of the past.

Less community-oriented, Grecsó's novel *Welcome* portrays an isolated village on the Great Hungarian Plain. The novel is both a coming-of-age novel and a singular detective story, which brings to life a series of incidents in the imaginary village called 'Sáraság' ('sár' meaning mud), and traces the life of the protagonist from childhood to his twenty-third birthday in 1990. The village, which seems to be completely disconnected from the outside world, has a strange system of beliefs, the roots of which can be traced back to an unusual religiosity, pagan superstitions and frequent drunkenness. The novel recounts countless marvelous sub-plots about these peculiar people, tragic and comic at the same time, and these stories give the readers insight into the realities of rural society in Hungary during the Soviet occupation. The protagonist, who leaves the mythical village as a teenager, finally returns after seven years to get to the roots of his origins, making inquiries into both his own and the village's past, and begins to suspect that the Jewish Ede Klein, a mythical figure for the village and a frequent visitor of women's nightmares, who was expelled from the village in 1948 due to a blood libel, may have been his father. At the end of the novel, he has to face and accept his own personal history (or rather the lack of it) for the first time in his life.

Based on Faris' definition of magical realism² and the characteristics of collective trauma, each chapter has the following structure: the study of the magical element while focusing on the presence of the ghosts; the use of language, with special emphasis on polyphony, orality and the ideology behind language usage; the representations of time and space; problems of forming a coherent identity; and understanding the narratives as means of exorcism, intending to conjure away the painful past through evoking and relieving it. As the ghosts and the other supernatural occurrences are central in all three texts and they are connected to the collective traumatic events portrayed, it is logical to start the discussion with their analysis. Language is also of central importance both in magical realism and trauma narratives: in the former, it has to be matter-of-fact, even while describing unbelievable events, while in the latter it has to represent the fracture caused by the traumatic event and has to try to speak the unspeakable. As for the spatial-temporal frames of the novels, they all bear resemblance to each other due to the nature of traumatic memory they try to reconstruct, and they also exhibit the characteristics of magical realist narratives in the sense that they disrupt our ideas of time and space. Also, the existence of a coherent identity is oftentimes questioned in magical realist texts,

² An "irreducible element of magic"; the "strong presence of the phenomenal world" described in a detailed way; the "experience [of] some unsettling doubts" in an attempt "to reconcile two contradictory understanding of events"; "merg[ing] different realms"; and the disruption of "received ideas about time, space, and identity" (*Ordinary Enchantments* 7).

and particularly in these three novels both individual and collective identity are problematized due to the traumatic experience of the individuals and the communities depicted. The order of the first four subchapters also follow the aforementioned definition of magical realism. Lastly, together with the first subchapters centering on the supernatural elements, the last subchapters, while understanding the texts as attempts of exorcism, provide a framework of interpretation for the three works. Also, they logically follow the chapters on identity: due to the aftereffects of trauma, the identities of the characters are shattered, and in all three novels an exorcism is needed for them to regain their lost selves.

Indeed, all three novels center on a traumatic event in the community's life, and all three contain an “irreducible element of magic” (Faris *Ordinary Enchantments* 7). Ghosts, standing for the repressed past, are present in all the novels, but with noticeable differences, *Beloved* being the most complex among them in this regard. They all use oral traditions and folklore, and clearly portray “different realms” with “a strong presence of the phenomenal world” besides the supernatural (Faris 7). Also, notions of space, time and identity—both collective and individual—are significant in the works. All novels have an “extraordinary sense of place” (Stepito 10), but this space is used in quite different ways. In addition, time is disrupted, and the present is loaded with the

past in all the works to such an extent that the future is impossible even to think about, as expected in a work on trauma. Finally, searching for a coherent identity is also one of the main themes of the novels: *Welcome* is a Bildungsroman, thus individual identity is necessarily one of its main concerns, but also in *Beloved* the characters need to 'claim' themselves in order to be truly free from their past, that is, slavery, and in *The Guest* people cannot forge an independent identity freed from ideology as long as they do not face the memory of the past trauma. The community's role is central in the quest for identity in all the novels, but in this respect *Welcome* has a different conclusion that seems to be the result of the author's deep distrust in the community as such after the fracture caused by the Holocaust and the Soviet regime. Also, there is a ritualistic scene in all three novels emphasizing the possibility of reading the works indeed as exorcisms aiming to purge the community from the aftereffects of collective, historical trauma, but the development of these rituals is greatly different in each narrative.

II. Theoretical Background

II.2 Trauma and Its Representation in Literature

Trauma has been part of everyday life since the beginnings of human civilization, but attention to its particular symptoms was paid relatively late.³ The reason for this is simple: the normal reaction to trauma, both on individual and collective level, is to banish it from consciousness. Severe atrocities naturally become unspeakable, as they violate people's belief in a fair or safe world, expose their vulnerability and oftentimes the cruelty of others, that is, the true capacity of evil committed by other human beings. Traumatic events severe one of the most basic human needs, trust in other human beings, and destroy the victims' belief in their ability to successfully manage their own lives. Besides those who have been victimized by traumatic events, trauma is also painful for those who decide to listen as well: "[t]o study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events" (Herman 7), and the pain, suffering, hopelessness, anxiety and other symptoms of the victims can be transferred to a

³ Most notable theorists on trauma include Jean-Martin Charcoat, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Marianne Hirsch, Dori Laub, and Judith Herman, among others. As trauma studies is an interdisciplinary field, it is studied from several perspectives (history, psychology, psychoanalysis, medicine, etc.). Although this dissertation relies on theorists from different fields, its main understanding of trauma is based on the psychoanalytic approach.

certain degree to those who listen to their testimonies. Finally, its definition is problematic as well: it cannot be defined by the event itself, which may or may not cause mental symptoms, only by “*the structure of its experience ...*: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it”, thus, “[t]o be traumatized is ... to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, *Introduction* 4-5).

Nevertheless, there have been three particular periods of time when trauma was in the focus of attention, and all the time it was linked with a political movement. The first was hysteria, whose “study grew out of the republican, anticlerical political movement” (Herman 9) in France at the end of the nineteenth century. The second time was the study of the so-called ‘shell shock’ or combat neurosis, which started after the First World War, but reached its peak due to the Vietnam War; its political context was the growing anti-war movement. Finally, sexual abuse and domestic violence have become the focus of trauma studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century due to the strengthening feminist movement.

Firstly, hysteria, which was originally believed to originate from the uterus (hence its name), was first studied systematically by the French neurologist, Charcot. He documented the symptoms of the disease carefully and

restored its dignity as a mental illness by objective and neutral study; he was the first who understood that there are psychological reasons behind the physiological symptoms of hysteria. Nevertheless, the causes of hysteria were only addressed by his followers, Janet in France and Freud in Vienna. They came to the conclusion that hysteria is in fact caused by psychological trauma, and that the consciously unbearable events cause an altered state of consciousness (called dissociation in modern-day psychiatric discourse) responsible for the hysterical symptoms. They also discovered that the symptoms could be mitigated by recovering the traumatic memories, and by helping the patients to verbalize them. This is how psychoanalysis was born. However, after publishing *The Aetiology of Hysteria* in 1896, in which Freud reached to the conclusion “that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience” (203), he had to repudiate his theory due to the scandal it had caused. This is how the study of hysteria ended: with the assumption that most of the atrocities told by patients in psychoanalysis were solely the products of the women’s imagination later repressed; thus, the trauma causing hysteria was not external, but it was “rather ... the unacceptable nature of sexual and aggressive wishes” (Shoshana 2).

However, not long after the discourse on hysteria, the devastating effects of the First World War caused the discussion on psychological trauma to

re-emerge. It was named ‘shell shock’ first, due to the fact that Myers, a British psychologist, who was one of the first professionals examining the patients exhibiting nervous disorders, attributed the symptoms to the effects of exploding shells.⁴ Freud, who also observed some common symptoms of veteran trauma patients, without linking it to his previous observations on hysteria, noted in 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the recurring dreams these patients had, in which they revived their traumatic memories again and again; but did not seem to be able to consciously recall later on. His observation can be the basis of today’s understanding of trauma, which Caruth, based on Freud, defines as a wound inflicted on the mind. This wound, as opposed to the wound of the body, a simple, healable event, is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (*Unclaimed* 4). Due to the effects of the Second World War and particularly the lost war in Vietnam, the legitimacy of which was questioned even in the USA, psychological trauma was finally officially recognized “as a lasting and inevitable legacy of war” (Herman 27), and as a

⁴ Charles Samuel Myers, “A Contribution to the Study of Shell Shock”, *Lancet* vol. 1, 1915, pp. 316-320. Although he did not invent the term itself, it was used first officially in his aforementioned article.

mental disorder it became a new diagnosis in the official manual⁵ of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 under the name of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD).

The third study on psychological trauma readdressed the issue of sexual trauma, and has been centering around the violence women and children suffer from, oftentimes as parts of their domestic lives. For a long time, rape as a crime was not taken seriously, particularly when committed by an acquaintance, close friend or family member (especially not when a woman was raped by her own husband), and victims of rape and abuse were shamed and humiliated if seeking legal help. Although the situation is changing, there is still much to be done in this respect, and several fictive works take upon the responsibility to portray the scorn of the community in such cases as well as the ignorance of bystanders.⁶

Traumatic events, which involve “threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death”, force individuals to face “the extremities of helplessness and terror” (Herman 33). In such situations, the survivors’ nervous system is aroused, producing a rush of adrenalin, and they “enter a state of alertness. Traumatic responses occur when both resistance and escape are impossible, overwhelming the individual’s self-defense system”

⁵ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III).

⁶ See the works *Rape: A Love Story* by Joyce Carol Oates or *Bastard out of Carolina* and the short story collection *Thrash* by Dorothy Allison, among others.

(Bousoon 7). As these situations produce “profound and lasting changes in psychological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory”, the individual encountering traumatic events “may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion” (Herman 34). As a result of the fact that these experiences are overwhelming to the extent that they “cannot be integrated into existing mental frameworks”, they are “dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experience” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). Therefore, the term dissociation is inseparable from traumatic memory; and as opposed to repression, which means pushing down to the unconscious, “[d]issociation reflects a horizontally layered model of mind” where the traumatic memory “is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness ... in traumatic reenactments” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 168). As a result, Caruth understands PTSD as more a “symptom of history” than the “symptom of the unconscious”, as the victims of trauma “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (*Introduction* 5).

In general, three categories of major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can be distinguished: hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction. Hyperarousal means that the initial “[p]hysical arousal continues unabated”

(Herman 35), hence the victim sleeps badly, reacts to every slight cause to irritation, and lives in a constant state of danger and anxiety. Intrusion stands for the constant recurring of the traumatic event as if it was still in the present: the trauma interrupts the lives of its victims, “as if time stop[ped] at the moment of trauma” (Herman 37). This is one of the characteristics of trauma addressed most often in literature, where characters suffering from PTSD are often portrayed as stuck in time and space. Moreover, Sethe’s rememories can serve as a perfect example of this intrusion of the past. Finally, as a result of self-defense, “constriction or numbing” (Herman 42) is the third major symptom of the disorder: victims can feel detached from their bodies, and disconnected from ordinary experience, quite similarly to a trance state. This altered states of consciousness is “one of nature's small mercies, a protection against unbearable pain” and the symptoms include the “surrender of voluntary action, suspension of initiative and critical judgement, subjective detachment or calm, enhanced perception of imagery, altered sensation, including numbness and analgesia, and distortion of reality, including depersonalization, derealization, and change in the sense of time” (Herman 42-43). Numbing is perhaps adaptive at the time of the traumatic event itself, but afterwards it can cause post-traumatic amnesia, and in general can affect the victims’ thoughts, state of consciousness, and their capability for initiative and action. In addition, traumatized people can easily

become unable to plan for the future, and in an attempt to avoid any situations resembling the past traumatic events, victims often narrow down their lives and confine themselves in a regulated, barren present, such as Sethe in *Beloved*.

To sum up, after the survival of a traumatic event, individuals are “caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma”, that is, “between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all” (Herman 47). After the frequency of the intrusive symptoms decrease, more numbing symptoms appear: feelings of alienation, disconnection, and inner deadness start to dominate the individual's mental and emotional life.⁷ In addition, traumatic memories become parts of “an abnormal type of memory that spontaneously erupts into consciousness in the forms of flashbacks and nightmares” (Bouson 7), and any trivial, seemingly insignificant reminder can trigger these memories, thus no environment ends up being safe for the survivors.⁸ Furthermore, trauma can “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (Herman 51), and it also affects autobiographical memory, thus ultimately fragmentizing a stable personal identity.

⁷ For instance, the symptom of inner deadness is captured very vividly in *The Human Stain* by Philip Roth in the character of Lester Farley, who constantly feels he is dead inside.

⁸ This is illustrated very clearly in Morrison's *Home*, where Frank Money, the protagonist, a veteran of the Korean War, has sudden flashbacks and loses his consciousness upon simply seeing red, which reminds him of blood seen as a soldier in Korea.

Therefore, it can be concluded that trauma shatters the victims' sense of time, space and memory, and ultimately their identities as well: they have to live in "two utterly incompatible worlds" at once, the world of the traumatic event and their ordinary existence. Because the trauma is linked with a definite time in the victim's past, traumatized people necessarily "live out their existences in two different stages of the life cycle, the traumatic past, and the bleached present" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1977), and as the traumatized part of the personality could not develop since the time of the trauma, it is not easy to connect these two kinds of experience. Building a connection between the present and the past trauma is one of the aims of therapy for PTSD patients, and it is also one the major themes of the novels discussed.

In addition, the trauma victims' ability to relate to others necessarily suffer as well: they cannot easily trust other people anymore, and lose their faith in the goodness of human nature, in their own abilities, and in a safe world, while also losing a sense of community. However, how the community reacts to the sufferings of the victim is also of crucial importance. In case of Sethe, as no one tries to understand her pain, she is also completely unable to be reintegrated to the community. In general, the traumatized individuals need help from the community to be able to mourn their losses and share their burden by verbalizing it and making the traumatic event part of their linear life narrative it

disrupted. In other words, if memory is understood as past events which can be told as a narrative, “[t]raumatic memory, by contrast, is wordless and static”; more like “a series of still snapshots” (Herman 175) without emotions. Only by reconstructing the traumatic memory and integrating it into their life stories can trauma victims reclaim their identities, and only by sharing these memories can they reestablish their sense of community. Thus, Herman powerfully describes the healing power of the community: “[t]rauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity” (214). On the other hand, the community can also shame, stigmatize and expel its members. This ambiguity of the community’s influence is clearly shown in *Beloved*, where Sethe is first ostracized by her peers due to her perceived excessive pride, and also in *Welcome*, where the community collectively refuse to face the past trauma.

Besides individuals, trauma can affect whole populations as well, and it can also be transmitted intergenerationally. After systematic political violence, for instance, whole communities can suffer from the symptoms of PTSD, and can become “trapped in alternating cycles of numbing and intrusion, silence and reenactment” (Herman 242). In addition, if personal trauma is connected to

one's identity, collective or cultural trauma is closely connected to group identity. As Alexander defines it, “[c]ultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). It is a trauma shared by several members of a group: the memory of slavery for African-Americans, the Holocaust, the Soviet occupation in Eastern Europe, the Korean War, and the September 11, 2001 attack in the USA. However, societies can experience severe crisis without having any traumatic event. What matters is the representation of the disastrous incidents, as trauma is “the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity” (Alexander 10).

Also, just like in case of individuals, commemoration and mourning are necessary steps in order to recover from collective trauma. Lessons of the trauma “become objectified in monuments, museum, and collections of historical artifacts” (Alexander 23), and in this process of routinization, strong emotions associated with the trauma process gradually disappear. However, it can only happen if the community has a sense of retribution, and people in general feel that the truth concerning the different atrocities committed was indeed revealed. On the other hand, for instance in case of the newly

established democracies in Eastern Europe in the post-Soviet period, in their previous political systems the history of abuse was so wide-spread that there were no remaining politicians who could be called completely innocent, thus accountability was virtually impossible. In addition, “dictatorship demanded not merely the acquiescence but the complicity of the general population”, hence abuses “were pervasive and officially condoned at the time that they were committed”. Therefore, accountability was impossible, but without some form of retribution, “all social relationships” necessarily “remain contaminated by the corrupt dynamics of denial and secrecy” (Herman 243), which is precisely the case of Hungarian public affairs, and which problem is portrayed in *Welcome* as well.

The process of constructing cultural trauma is especially interesting in case of slavery, which, as Eyerman argues, was created retrospectively, that is, after slavery had already been abolished: “[t]he notion of a unique African American identity emerged in the post-Civil War period”. Hence he comes to the conclusion that “[t]he trauma of forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly experienced by many of the subjects ..., but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance” (60). The way slavery was remembered, reinterpreted and represented also

changed from time to time, depending on the different needs and social circumstances of the African American community. After the failure of restoration, when the promised equality regardless of race became a pipe dream, slavery was first “articulated as cultural trauma” (Eyerman 76) and it defined one’s identity as an African American: as an American whose ancestors were taken as slaves from Africa. Therefore, slavery became a common reference point for all members of the community. Since then, the representation of slavery has been changing radically. Just to state a few examples, in the Harlem renaissance it was a usable past, a stepping stone towards civilization; while in Garveyism it was interpreted as a tragic past, whereas the goal for the future was to restore Africa’s past greatness and lost glory. In Malcom X’s movement, slavery was a justification for regarding white people as the source of ultimate evil, whereas in the civil rights movement slavery was the beginning of the desire for freedom.

Ultimately, if we understand collective memory as what people say concerning the past (a metanarrative, so to speak), the role of discourse and also of literary works become apparent. From this respect, the work of Toni Morrison, who focuses on different aspects of African American collective identity and the heritage of slavery in all her works, are particularly compelling; indeed, it is her goal to preserve and bequeath the legacy of African American

tradition and beliefs to next generations to come, in order to help them leading a meaningful existence.

Moving on from trauma in a medical and psychological sense to its cultural representations, it seems that there has been a particular interest in trauma studies since the end of the twentieth century; not just in psychology and psychiatry, the main fields of study concerning mental disorders, but in every aspects of life. There is a growing number of publications approaching trauma from various fields: social and literary studies, comparative literature, philosophy, ethics, etc. At the same time, from talk shows to the news broadcasts, from popular media (post-apocalyptic movies, disaster films, games) to art movies, from direct testimonies of survivors to fictive accounts of traumatic experience, there is a proliferation of all kinds of representations of trauma to the extent that testimony has been suggested as “the literary mode ... of our times”, whereas “our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony” (Felman 17). In accordance with this statement, the end of the century has been indeed an age of catastrophe: “[w]orld wars, local wars, civil wars, ideological wars, ethnic wars, the two atomic bomb attacks, the Cold War, genocides, famines, epidemics” (Berger 572) up to the conflicts with IS: these events and their representations have shaped how the world is perceived. However, it is important to note the difference between trauma and a disastrous

incident: as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in case of trauma the effects are diverse, dispersed, and they can be manifested in several forms that are not evidently linked with the traumatic event itself. Also, latency is a highly important feature of trauma, which means that there is usually a time period between the experience of the traumatic event and its full impact. Therefore, the traumatic analysis, which is fundamentally a retrospective reconstruction of a past event, can be linked to the question of history, historical narrative and narrative in general. In addition, trauma studies can help us understand different cultural symptoms. As trauma also problematizes language and representation, trauma theory can be linked to other theoretical discourses concerning the unrepresentable as well.

Considering literary texts about trauma, they can be best understood as “verbal representations of a fracture” (Menyhért 5).⁹ Silence accompanies both psychological, individual trauma and cultural trauma, where the latter is often even silenced by an oppressive government for ideological reasons. As already discussed, the only way to recover from trauma is to verbalize it, which is already problematic as it is due to the nature of traumatic memory. However, another problem is that verbalizing and sharing the traumatic event with someone or a community unavoidably traumatizes the audience as well. Nevertheless, it is the sole possibility of helping the survivor in the process of

⁹ All translations from Hungarian to English were made by me.

constructing a coherent narrative out of the fragmented traumatic memory; listening to a testimony is a moral responsibility of humanity.

Regarding literature's role in the process of recovery from trauma, it can be stated that the existence of a language in which the traumatic event can be expressed is essential. A language which does not try to hide the event, but rather shows how language prior to the experience is incapable of representing the trauma; and a language which makes this fracture visible. Thus, this is a language that cannot be naïve or too trusting either; rather, it includes suspicion on the nature of language itself, the awareness of the impossibility of total control over language, and remembers anxiety and the fracture caused by the traumatic event. Obviously, the realization over the limitations of language are not only the findings of trauma studies, but rather part of an ongoing process in social studies since the First World War, after which a belief in a logical, rational world order has disappeared. Due to its characteristics and its similar suspicion towards language, postmodern literature in general can be seen as highly appropriate for trauma narratives.

Furthermore, the connection between trauma and ideology should be addressed too, as it is inseparable from collective trauma. By ideology, what is meant here is the institutionalized collective amnesia following traumatic events, such as the 1956 revolution in Hungary, the Gwangju uprising in 1980

(both immediately silenced by the oppressive dictatorships), or the atrocities committed during slavery, which were ‘forgotten’ or recreated in the dominant discourse after the restoration by using recurring figures such as the benevolent master and the satisfied, cheerful Negro slave, in order to create a fake nostalgia towards the days of slavery. (The role of literary representation is especially crucial in this example.) Collective traumatic events are particularly vulnerable to distortion, as the community also cannot create a coherent narrative out of the cultural trauma, just as individuals are incapable of this process. Hence, ideology can fill out the silence with a false interpretation or by simple silence, illustrated both in Orwell’s *1984* and *Animal Farm*. This “secondary traumatization” caused by “the inability to talk about traumatic experiences” (Rosenthal 37), first of all, makes the victims doubtful about their own memories; instead of overcoming trauma by recalling and reconstructing it, ideology starts to dominate thinking and language, offering a false sense of safety. Thus, a linguistic paradigm is created, which “by masking; brainwashing; lying both in a moral sense and as a trope, as a verbal component; the gradual elimination of resistance; acclimatization; and by the institutionalization of violence” (Menyhért 8) succeeds in manipulating the subject to eventually recognize this ideology as his or her own. Therefore, both the individual and the community end up being deprived of an independent

identity and the possibility of creating a legitimate narrative for the group. As a result, in order to break the silence or the distorted narratives, the issue of language has first to be implored; the victims need to find their own voice, free of the dominant ideological discourse as best as possible, which is capable of representing the fracture.

That a trauma narrative can be written and read proves that it is no longer unspeakable. However, for this to happen it always needs a reader or a listener. Thus, by reading and analyzing trauma narratives, one can facilitate the recovery process from collective trauma, and generations silenced or oppressed by totalitarian governments can also find their own voice and stories through their written testimonies. As Jie Young Kim phrases it, “[i]n this way, literature and storytelling become powerful tools, generating a history often at odds with the official, authorized one” (43). For instance, how slavery was repeatedly addressed by African Americans can be understood as a counter-narrative against its representation in the dominant discourse; or how certain authors in the Soviet era chose to depict historical events, after which they oftentimes ended in prison, is a similar example. These literary texts or non-fictive testimonies have helped the community in accessing their past and rejecting the hostile or simply false ideologies of official narratives of history.

Inevitably, trauma narratives are always conscious of how language is used and the certain limitations it exhibits, which should be addressed in literary criticism regarding these texts as well. In addition, pieces of criticism can be also interpreted as secondary trauma texts, or as secondary testimonies: “they mediate between the trauma and the readers, while also providing an experience on the possibilities of interpreting trauma” (Menyhért 7). Hence they can facilitate understanding and the acceptance of the individual or cultural trauma others have suffered from. However, whether the trauma of others can be fully understood remains a question, just like whether trauma can be, after all, represented truthfully at all. Lyotard’s definition of traumatic experience and its connection to art: “[w]hat art can do, is bear witness not to the sublime, but to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it” (Heidegger 47) is essentially the same as that of Vonnegut’s in *Slaughterhouse Five*, where the narrator realizes that “there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre” (19), thus the novel is “a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt” (22). By drawing a comparison between himself and Lot’s wife, who turned around even though she had known she would be punished for her action, but who is praised for her humanity in the novel nevertheless, the narrator justifies his project as the only humane thing to do under inhumane conditions. Therefore, even if writing

about trauma can be a failure if the goal is to represent something by its nature unrepresentable, it is still a valuable and meaningful endeavor that helps the individual and the community to recover from the traumatic experience itself and also in forging a new identity.

Finally, in the twenty-first century, trauma can function as a connection between different cultures as well, which is essentially the aim of this paper too. As Caruth stated, “[i]n a catastrophic age ... trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves” (*Introduction* 11). After all, while trying to understand the trauma of other individuals, groups or cultures, we can also understand our own traumatic history better, and instead of the differences between cultures, the similarities of human suffering remain hard to deny.

II.2 Magical Realism and Its Politics

The terms ‘magic realism’, ‘magical realism’ and ‘marvelous realism’ have always been problematic. The concept itself entails the “forced relationship of irreconcilable terms” (Bowers 1), which has made it both useful

and popular, but at the same time extremely hard to grasp. Whether it refers to a mode, a genre, or a concept of reality in a wider sense is still debated. Nevertheless, presently calling it a narrative mode seems the most frequent practice. According to its most basic and simple definition, the distinguishing feature of magical realism is that it presents magical occurrences but describes them using a realist, matter-of-fact tone. This dissertation argues that the aim of this kind of representation is not to escape or evade reality, but rather to revise realism and approach reality from a new perspective. While in modernism there was still a firm belief in the existence of an underlying reality, even if human knowledge of the world was fragmented and illusionary, postmodernism have refuted this claim. However, if language is only a social construct, and if history and identity are understood as fiction, texts also cannot refer to an objective reality directly. From this perspective, magical realism can be understood as a narrative strategy that intends to find new ways in order to portray reality and history, and particularly in case of the novels discussed, to narrate historical atrocities and collective trauma that cannot be portrayed by means of the literary devices of realism anymore.

Wendy Faris, one of the most prominent scholars writing on magical realism, proposes five distinguishing characteristics of the mode: first, that the magical realist text incorporates an “irreducible element of magic”; second, the

“strong presence of the phenomenal world” which is described in many details (this feature can be called the ‘realism’ of the narrative mode); third, the reader might “experience some unsettling doubts” in an attempt “to reconcile two contradictory understanding of events”; fourth, the text “merges different realms”; and fifth, the narrative “disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity” (*Ordinary Enchantments* 7). The last feature is especially important if magical realism is understood as a narrative mode. Our understanding of time is inevitably shaken by the presence of the ghosts in the three novels, and as for space, all the exorcisms happen in a sacred or mystical place. Finally, identity is also problematized in all three novels: due to its fluid boundaries there is a merge of identities in *Beloved*; in *The Guest* Yosöp becomes possessed by his brother; in *Welcome* the ancestors live on in the characters, and not knowing your past necessarily results in a lack of identity. Before a more detailed analysis on the narrative mode, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the term and to shed a light on the differences between ‘magic realism’, ‘magical realism’ and ‘marvelous realism’, a brief overview on the history of the narrative mode seems necessary.

The term magic realism was first used in Germany by Franz Roh in 1925, who coined the phrase in order to describe a form of post-expressionist painting style during the Weimar Republic. The magic represented in the

paintings was influenced by Freud's concept of the uncanny. As the art historian Guenther observes: "[t]he juxtaposition of "magic" and "realism" reflected ... the monstrous and marvelous *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) within human beings and inherent in their modern technical surroundings" (35). The Spanish translation of Roh's work, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus* became widely circulated in Latin America, and several famous writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges and Miguel Angel Asturias have been influenced by it.

In addition to Roh's concept on magic realist paintings, another important influence on the appearance of magic(al) realism in Latin America was that of post-expressionism and surrealism from Europe. Two writers, Alejo Carpentier, a French-Russian Cuban and Arturo Usler-Pietri from Venezuela both lived in Paris in the 1920s and 30s and were greatly immersed in European art and literature. Eventually, Carpentier became the one who is presently considered to be the founder of Latin-American magical realism. He coined the term 'marvellous realism' to express a concept which is the consequence of a great mixture of very different cultural systems and an immense variety of human experience. This racial and cultural mixture, unique to Latin America, necessarily creates an extraordinary view on life and reality. In fact, in his essays on the 'marvelous real' Carpentier alludes to the Spanish conquistador,

Hernán Cortés, who was unable to describe in his own language his various experiences in America, because there were no appropriate terms for it in a language rooted in European culture. Thus, Carpentier implied that reality on the American continent is an amplification of the sensed and perceived reality well-known for Europeans, and it is inherent in Latin American culture itself. In order to reach the fantastic, Latin Americans do not need to subvert reality with artificial methods, as “[t]he marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry” (87). Also, it is there in all the folk traditions: while Carpentier believes Western folk dances lost all their evocative powers, Latin American collective dances all possess a deep ritual sense and create a process of initiation (just like the dance of Sethe’s mother and her peers, one might add, in *Beloved*).

Then, a new term, ‘magical realism’ was coined by the critic Angel Flores in 1955, who used it in connection with Latin American fiction, naming Jorge Loius Borges as the first magical realist author, who he believed was most profoundly influenced by Franz Kafka. He sees magical realism as the continuation of the romantic realist tradition in Spanish literature, and traces back its origins to Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. Flores dismissed the rich, baroque style proposed by Carpentier, and rather insisted on a clear, realist

tone, which prevents the narrative from “flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms” (116). As a result of his essay, there was renewed interest in Latin American literature, Carpentier and marvelous realism as well. This led to a second wave of magical realist writings, which were not directly associated with Flores’ definition on the term, and which combined elements of both the marvelous real and magic realism. This new kind of magical realism has become extremely popular after the Cuban revolution in 1959, when there was a heightened search for new styles and modes of writing, inherently Latin American, but also indisputably modern. In addition, after the success of several magical realist writers and works, magical realist narratives started to emerge in all other continents. The term ‘magical realism’ is used in the dissertation as well, as magic realism is generally associated with Europe and/or Roh’s concept, which is more closely related to the uncanny than to supernatural or fantastical elements.

Due to their complicated history, magic(al) realism and marvelous realism are hard to define and distinguish. In addition, magical realism has especially become a highly popular term, and it “has been used for such a variety of fictions and theories that the very variety compels critics to teeter on the verge of inconsistency, juxtaposition and even contradiction” (Hinchcliffe & Jewinski 6). The term itself depends on the prior understanding of ‘magic’

and ‘realism’, and though ‘magic’ in magic realism is understood as the “mystery of life” (Bowers 20), in marvelous realism and magical realism it refers to any supernatural, spiritual or, simply, any extraordinary events otherwise unexplainable by rational science and Western logic. On the other hand, realism, which is originally related to Aristotle’s concept of mimesis, but only came into being as a distinct term in the eighteenth century, is somewhat easier to define, but all the more confusing in connection with magic. In literature, realism attempted to represent ordinary, familiar things as they were and tried to portray life in all its diversity. In fact, magical realism can be understood as the continuation of literary realism: as several authors stated¹⁰ regarding their magical realist texts, their aim was to represent reality in its totality, but were unable to do so by means of the literary devices of realism.

To complicate the matter further, there were also attempts to differentiate between two or three distinct versions of magical realism. The Cuban-born critic of Latin American literature, González Echevarría proposed two kinds of magic realism: a ‘phenomenological magical realism’, which corresponds to Roh’s ideas on magic realism, and an ‘ontological magical realism’, rooted in Carpentier’s concept of the marvelous real. Although he himself is skeptical about the term’s usefulness, as Aldea points out, the problems he raises concerning magical realism are extremely valid even today:

¹⁰ Among them Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison, and Krisztián Greccsó.

“is the magic understood as supernatural, or merely a way of looking at reality? Is the magic inherent in reality or is it purely textual?” (2).

The questions above also shape Spindler’s system, who differentiates between three variants of magical realism. The first, ‘metaphysical magic realism’ uses defamiliarization in order to create a disturbing, uncanny atmosphere. As Spindler phrases: “[a]s a style, it presents the natural and the ordinary as supernatural, while structurally excluding the supernatural as a valid interpretation” (78). Thus, the supernatural as such is actually excluded from the work itself. The second variant, ‘anthropological magic realism’, is the closest to the current definition of the narrative mode. This variation employs two voices, a rational, realist one and the one believing in magic. The contradiction between the two is resolved by the author’s adoption of the myths, cultural background and collective unconscious of a social or ethnic group, thus presenting a specific cultural world-view, where the magical and the rational can coexist. Spindler connects metaphysical magical realism to the search for national identity characterizing postcolonial countries, and argues that it furthers the claims of colonized people to the acceptance of their beliefs as equal to Western rationality and science. The novels discussed in detail would also belong to this category. Finally, in ‘ontological magic realism’ the same two voices (rational and a belief in the magical) appear, but the antinomy is

resolved without referring back to a shared cultural perspective. Here the supernatural is also presented as natural, in a matter-of-fact tone, thus the unreal events in the text are not explained; however, “[t]here is no reference to the mythical imagination of pre-industrial communities. Instead, the total freedom and creative possibilities of writing are exercised by the author, who is not worried about convincing the reader” (82).

Spindler’s metaphysical magic realism and González Echevarría’s phenomenological magical realism is fundamentally the same. On the other hand, González Echevarría’s ontological realism was divided into two categories by Spindler based on the origin of the magical. In anthropological magic realism the magic stems from a specific extra-textual reality, whereas in Spindler’s ontological magic realism the magic originates from the text itself. However, both the ethnic cultural background and the matter-of-fact tone is employed to resolve the implicit contradiction between magic and realism, Western logic and the supernatural. Therefore, as “magical realism can be concerned with different cultural versions of reality” (Aldea 3), the use of the narrative mode to question cultural hegemony and the effects of colonization seems adequate.

Thus, the connection between magical realism and postcolonial literature has been widely studied as well. As the narrative mode of magical

realism offers an alternative approach to reality compared to that of Western rationality, it is natural that authors coming from a different cultural background than that of the colonizers would employ it. Critics “generally agree that magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic” (Zamora & Faris 5). The narrative mode is also frequently used to write against totalitarian regimes for the exact same reasons: it offers the writer the “means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems (e.g. colonialism) by attacking the stability of the definitions upon which these systems rely” (Bowers 4). Who has the power to define identity is a central question in *Beloved* as well, where Morrison attempts to give it back to African Americans, who were previously defined by slave-owners. In general, it can be stated that writers of magical realism have their “narrative position outside the dominant power structure and cultural centres” (Bowers 48), and their agenda is to disrupt official approaches to history, truth and reality.

The most influential argument on the relationship between postcolonial literature and magical realism is Slemon’s 1988 article. He insists that in magical realist narratives, there is always a battle between two oppositional systems, “each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other” (409). As a result of the incompatibility of the two

worlds, “neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other’, a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rendering them with gaps, absences, and silences” (409). In other words, as a result of its dual narrative structure, magical realism is adequate to present the world from both the colonized and colonizing people’s perspectives by employing “two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other” (410).

In addition, magical realism is also able to create a narrative in which the tensions, gaps and silences of representation, created by the context of colonization, are presented. These gaps can be read as negative gaps, reflecting the difficulties of expression for the colonized opposing the colonist’s power, but they can also be understood as positive gaps, new possibilities to be filled with the alternative perspective of the colonized. Slemon regards the political agenda of these texts as giving back the voice to “the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems” (422). Faris in her study on magical realism reaches a quite similar conclusion: she calls the mode a “narrative inscription” which works “to transfer discursive power from colonizer to colonized, to provide a fictional ground in which to imagine alternative narrative visions of agency and history” (140). She states that

magical realist writers, such as Rushdie, Toni Morrison or Milan Kundera, use “their magic against the established order” and this “magic often ultimately highlights the historical atrocities narrated in them” (140), which is again a common feature of the novels discussed.

Another critic, Brenda Cooper also sees the strength of magical realism in its portrayal of the gap, of a “third space” “in the fertile interstices between ... extremes of time and space”, capturing “the paradox of the unity of opposites ..., such as history versus magic, the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death” (1). Cooper, relying on Jameson’s ideas on postmodern, comes to the conclusion that the frequently chaotic clash of capitalism and the pre-capitalist society of developing countries works as a catalyst for magical realism. According to Cooper, this hybridity of the genre (expressed both in its techniques and politics) is what allows magical realism to resist imperialism and encourage cultural multiplicity. She defines hybridity as “a syncretism between paradoxical dimensions of life and death, historical reality and magic, science and religion”, and believes that it “characterizes the plot, themes and narrative structures of magical realist novels” (32). It is precisely this hybridity that allows the writer to see with a third eye or to create a third space, transcending the binary opposition between colonizers and colonized. Thus, although Cooper does not define magical realism as having its

source in a specific culture, she does explicitly link the genre's essential hybridity to a postcolonial context, and also adheres to Jameson's view that magical realism was born from the conflict between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. What is important to note though is that the third space she sees as a result of this hybridity allows a reconciliation between the contradictions of magic and reality, or in other words, between the two cultures or worldviews of the colonizers and colonized. Thus, Cooper states that "[t]his hybridity is at the heart of the politics and the techniques of magical realism" (20).

As magical realist narratives have started to appear in Hungary, different theories were articulated by Hungarian scholars as well regarding the nature of the narrative mode. Papp, who synthesized previous approaches stated that the core of the magical realist worldview is an attempt to portray the experience of a non-verbal existence through language. This non-linguistic existence cannot be captured in a rational manner, only through a hybrid, figurative language and through magical realism's unique representation of time and space. This existential experience is based on a new definition of the subject, of identity, and it transforms the real or virtual place of identity into a magical space. This identity (which can be connected to a subject, to language, culture, or a geographical location, like a village or town) is sensed at the crossing border between multiple cultures, languages, external influences and

hereditary factors; it is a kind of center, where at once different and even mutually exclusive codes are true and the boundaries between them can be crossed. Papp states that the two components of magical realism are: a collective, plural, irrational and interconnected magical time and space on one hand, and the individual's confrontation with it in a linguistic product on the other. However, "there is an irreconcilable theoretical distance between these two sides, hence their relationship remains reflexive: linguistic and linguistically uncontrollable, magical and the one trying to grasp it". In accordance with her views, the major features of magical realist narratives in Hungary is the importance of remembering the past, the role of storytelling, and the continuous reconstruction of identity (Malek "I").

A possible question regarding magical realist texts, particularly the ones written in a postcolonial context and/or those that chose to narrate a traumatic historical event is whether there is a straightforward political reading of magical realist narratives; whether the magic embodies politics. As Zamora and Faris state it in their introduction to a collection of essays on magical realism, the reason for the subversive nature of magical realist texts is that "their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women" (6). By

negating the notion of a singular version of reality and absolute truth, it is possible in magical realist narratives for many truths to exist simultaneously; in this sense, the mode definitely follows the footsteps of postmodern literature. Indeed, when Lyotard concerning postmodern literature demanded to “wage war on totality”, “be witnesses to the unrepresentable”, and “activate the differences” (*Postmodern* 82), it seems that magical realist writers heeded the call. For instance, Toni Morrison in *Beloved* clearly disrupts fixed categories of reality, truth and history, and tries to represent the unrepresentable: in the context of slavery, slaves could only express themselves in the vocabulary of the dominant discourse, but Morrison’s narrative is told from the perspective of female slaves.

Thus, it is not surprising that several writers, “whose cultural perspectives include varied and sometimes contradictory cultural influences” (Bowers 83), choose magical realism as a narrative mode. Already Carpentier emphasized the cross-cultural nature of Latin America, and believed this is what made it suitable for marvelous realism. However, besides Latin American writers, magical realism is employed by many writers all over the world. For instance, Bowers analyzes three different American writers, all coming from a different cross-cultural context, but writing from the perspective of a narrator with a predominantly non-Western cultural perspective: the African American

Toni Morrison, the Chinese American Maxine Hong Kingston and the Native American Leslie Marmon Silko. Interestingly, only Morrison acknowledged the term magical realism in connection with her works, but even she rejected it later “due to misconceptions brought about by the overly frequent use of the term in the 1990s” (Bowers 85). Nevertheless, they all employ techniques of magical realism in order to challenge the authority of the dominant culture and articulate their communal histories to establish their own cultural identities.

Morrison once stated that magical realism provides “[a]nother way of knowing things” (Evans 342), and it is precisely this another way which allows her narrative to refute the claims of an authoritative history. It also allowed her to incorporate African American myths, such as the flight of slaves back to Africa in *Song of Solomon*, and enabled her to make these myths meaningful for African Americans again in her narrative. Both in *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* the major characters are on a quest (Milkman quite literally) in order to find their identities through understanding their families’ and their communities’ past. Ultimately, Morrison’s agenda is to create a shared cultural memory for African Americans through constructing narratives on African American history, weaving aspects of African American oral culture and myths into her novels—some of which even referring back to a West African cultural heritage.

Therefore, not surprisingly, one of the frequently employed techniques of magical realism is the incorporation of the residual elements of culture,¹¹ and especially through oral storytelling traditions, used in all three novels discussed. In storytelling, the listener can guide the storyteller by asking questions, making it an interactive meaning-making process which “is thought to promote communities by binding people together in a creative act” (Bowers 90). In addition, as the story can be altered slightly each time it is told, it is understood and accepted by the community that there is not one correct version, no ultimate truth; instead, there are many. Furthermore, magical realist novels are quite frequently set in rural areas away from the influence of political power centers (with some notable exceptions, such as Rushdie’s works set in London or Bombay). The three novels discussed all share this similarity. But even if the magical realist narrative is set in a big city, it is still “portrayed from the marginal perspectives of people lacking political power” (Bowers 32). This is also a feature that makes the narrative mode so appropriate for people writing from a postcolonial context, or more generally, from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered, like African Americans in America, immigrants, or women writing from a feminist perspective. As discussed in a detailed way further on, all the three novels portray marginalized people as well.

¹¹ As described in *Marxism and Literature* by Raymond Williams.

Regarding the residual elements found in magical realist texts, an interesting approach to the narrative mode is that of Wendy Faris', who compares magical realist narratives to the ritual of shamanistic healing:

In using the resources of realism to construct a defocalized discourse that while based on in ordinary sense perceptions also seems to carry the reader beyond them, magical realist narrative resembles the performance of a shaman who constructs a persona and a discourse that imaginatively negotiate different realms, joining the everyday world of concrete reality and the world of the spirits. (*Ordinary Enchantments* 75)

Faris evaluates this feature as an expression of a never-ending cultural need for contacting cosmic forces extending beyond material reality, and observes that both shamanic performance and magical realist fiction are a space where "magical manifestations of physicality take place", and that there is a "shared act of balancing between actual and extraordinary realities" (75) in both. In other words, magical realist narratives are similar to a shaman's activities, who, while walking on razors' edges, exists between the natural and supernatural universes, and who is capable of leaving and entering both of them

at their own free will. Faris also connects magical realism to the tradition of shamanistic visionary poets, like Blake or Rimbaud. In their works, there is a desire to reach beyond everyday reality, but they also admit the difficulty of the modern man in creating such a discourse. Faris sees it as the prefiguration of “the modification of realism by the fantastic and the complex combination of irony and belief with respect to the irreducible element” (76) in magical realist narratives. She also analyzes a few shamanistic curing rituals in order to further illustrate her point, and finds similarities in a shamanistic ritual and the defocalized narrative of magical realist fiction; such as the sudden appearance of the magical; surprising connections between the magical and natural; etc. Based on these analogues, Faris states that the readers of magical realist fiction “participate in a textual performance analogous to a shamanic trance in which voices that are imagined as coming from another realm are produced” (78).

In this sense, writers of magical realist texts can function as shamans, which is quite literally the case in *The Guest*. Also, as Anzaldúa observes concerning writers as shamans in general, “the role of a shaman is ... preserving and creating cultural or group identity by mediating between the cultural heritage of the past and the present everyday situations people find themselves in” (99), which is definitely one of the intentions of Hwang Sok-yong and Morrison in their respective texts. Therefore, the defocalized narrative of

magical realist fiction can be understood as turning to “dead civilizations” to “bring back a communal voice of indeterminate origin but possessing creative authority, with which it revivifies the narrative discourse of realism” (Faris 80)—similarly to how shamans use dead people’s power to aid the living.

Finally, magical realism certainly appeals to writers as a narrative mode for dealing with cultural, historical, social and political wounds. Thus, magical realist texts quite often address a specific historical wound and present a re-encounter with the past, resulting in a conjuration of the ghosts of collective and individual trauma. All three novels discussed also reenact the past in order to reach a different conclusion, and provide a chance for the community and the individual to commemorate and mourn their losses. From this perspective, the shamanistic voice Faris identified “represents the appeal to a power from a different place: ancient ‘guardians of life’ are invoked in order to deal with present social atrocities” (83). Whether there is communication with the dead, like in *Welcome* and *Beloved*, or there is literally a contemporary shamanistic curing performance, like in *The Guest*, these works all aim to exorcise the ghosts of historical trauma, even though they can never be expelled completely: [o]ne must, magically, chase away a specter, exorcise the possible return of a power held to be baleful in itself and whose demonic threat continues to haunt the century” (Derrida 96). Slavery and racism, the Korean War and the

Holocaust are all such specters, and they have to be accounted for, bear witness to and, paradoxically, remember in order to be able to forget. Whether the texts portray such an exorcism possible or inevitably a failure will be discussed in the next three chapters.

III. *Beloved* and the Trauma of Racial Shame

Morrison's portrayal of physical and emotional trauma in her works has already been dealt with by several critics. It is quite natural, since all her major characters suffer from traumatic experience, whether it be due to unattainable standards of beauty and the disinterested or repulsed gaze of the hegemonic culture (*The Bluest Eye*), post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the violence experienced in the Korean War (*Home*), being unable or unwilling to meet the demands imposed on the female body by a traditional society (*Paradise*), maternal hatred and disgust (*God Save the Child*), being female in a patriarchal society (*A Mercy*) or the physical and emotional impacts of slavery (*Beloved*). Besides individual trauma, several of Morrison's works deal with the question of the collective trauma of slavery and its aftereffects as the root of African American identity. These works, particularly *Beloved* and *Mercy*, do not only describe the humiliation and shame slaves (and especially women slaves) were subjected to, a humiliation which made them question their humanity, and dirtied them in a way worse than death, but it also shows the effects of "internalized racism—that is, socially produced feelings of self-contempt and self-hatred" (Bousoin 131) on the formation of their separate identities.

Understanding *Beloved* as a novel on trauma, several but not contradictory readings of the text have been suggested. For instance, the character Beloved is understood as the return of the repressed, “the ghost of slavery” by Koenan (117), which is supported by the fact that she is not only the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter. Moreover, she can also represent the sexually abused slave woman, herself having experienced rape: “[g]hosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (241).¹² She is “a powerful presence and yet an empty void”, who “objectifies the fragmented selfhood of the traumatized victim of slavery” (Bouson 152) in general.

Besides being a trauma narrative, several critics have read *Beloved* as a major work of magical realism as well. Bowers mentions Morrison's magical realist texts (*Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*) as examples of writing from a “cross-cultural perspective of a narrator who possesses a predominantly non-European or non-Western cultural perspective” (84). The cultural context she writes from is one where the cultural hegemony of the dominant culture threatens her community's traditions, history and self-evaluation, and her agenda is to challenge the authority of the dominant American culture and by doing that, lessen its power. According to Bowers, the articulation of the

¹² Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Penguin, 1998. Subsequent in-text citations refer to this edition of the novel and will therefore be identified by page number alone.

communal histories of African Americans is essential for Morrison to “provide the necessary knowledge for establishing and articulating their cultural identities” (85). Analyzing the novel from a slightly different point of view, Schroeder calls *Beloved* “the single best illustration” (95) of magical realism in the U.S., and interprets *Beloved*’s character as magical realism itself. Erickson concentrates on the central presence of the ghost in the text, the “spectral figure” that he believes “underpins the entire narrative and its thematic structure”, and whose major function is “to metaphorically represent the past and the way that the traces of the past persist in the present” (16). Furthermore, Wendy Faris also cites the novel frequently to illustrate various features of magical realism, and she interprets the novel as an example of a “magical historicity” (*Ordinary Enchantments* 138) found in many magical realist novels, such as *Midnight’s Children* or *The Tin Drum*. According to her, these narratives not only reflect history, but also want to change it “by addressing historical issues critically” and by “attempting to heal historical wounds” (138). Indeed, all of Morrison’s novels have a quite clear political agenda, which she herself summarized as such:

[T]he reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can’t really blame

the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. (C. Davis 224)

Writing *Beloved* on the history of slavery, which, according to Morrison, is something neither whites nor African Americans want to remember, is precisely such an attempt. Interestingly, Morrison refused the term 'magical realism' regarding her works specifically because she believed that stressing the magical in those works is ultimately "a way of *not* talking about the politics" and a "convenient way" "for literary historians and literary critics ... to skip again what was the truth in the art of certain writers" (C. Davis 226). On the contrary, this paper argues that magical realism is in fact "what allows the fantastic to be so inseparably woven through with substantial political significance" (Armitt 125) and it is particularly efficient in addressing historical wounds by at once confronting and reconstructing those disastrous incidents in a way that they can be beneficial for the generations to come. As Derrida explained, "[i]nheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task" (54), and

Morrison, just like the other two authors addressed, takes upon herself the responsibility of this task in most if not all of her novels.

III.1 The Specter of Rememory

First, the significance of the ghost *Beloved* from the perspective of trauma studies will be analyzed. As already discussed in details above, the most accepted definition of trauma is that it is a wound inflicted on the mind, which is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4). In case of *Beloved*, it should be noted though that when the reader encounters Sethe in the narrative, it is not that she is not conscious of her past trauma, but quite the opposite: it is “the insistence and full consciousness of Sethe’s traumatic memory” (Gibbs 74) that makes her constantly struggle to repress her (quite literally) haunting past. Instead, what she lacks is both the verbalization of the said past and the incorporation of it into her life narrative.

While the ‘tree’ on Sethe’s back and the fingerprints on *Beloved*’s forehead are physical signs of this traumatic wound, the psychological impacts are much more devastating, symbolized by for instance the presence of the

tobacco tin box where Paul D's red heart used to be. Also, trauma is verbally unrepresentable: that is why "the thoughts of the women in 124" remain "recognizable but undecipherable" (199) for Stamp Paid, who can only "make out ... the word *mine*. The rest of it stayed outside his mind's reach" (172). These thoughts are "unspeakable" and "unspoken" (199), but he understands intuitively what they are about: "although he couldn't cipher one word, he believed he knew who spoke them. The people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons. What a roaring" (181). That is, all the victims of the collective trauma of slavery, that sixty million and more African American people, and with a special emphasis on the female voice; at first, what surrounded 124 Bluestone Road sounded "like the interior sounds a woman makes when she believes she is alone and unobserved at her work" (172). Thus, Morrison places a special emphasis on the fact that she mostly depicts doubly marginalized people, both by race and gender.

Because the traumatic events are unspeakable, in *Beloved* the actual infanticide is described only in a fragmentary manner and from multiple perspectives, and even the fact that it happened is revealed quite late. The reason for this is that knowing and not knowing at the same time is always interwoven in complex ways in stories of trauma, and it is especially obvious in the language of trauma narratives. Sethe can never really tell, however hard she

tries, what really happened and why did she do it: “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask” (163). This circularity is also portrayed through Sethe’s movements: when Paul D confronts her with the newspaper clipping, she begins to circle frantically around the room in a manner that parallels the circular manner in which she unravels her story for him. She cannot explain it in a satisfactory manner even to Beloved at the end of the novel, although she is the only one to whom Sethe truly feels the need to explain. However, she does not wait for forgiveness even from her, as Sethe also understands that ultimately, her deed is unforgivable: “[i]t was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out” (252).

In addition, precisely because it is not available to the consciousness as such, trauma cannot be located in a simple, original event in the past of an individual, only when it returns to haunt the survivor. In Sethe’s case this haunting past is first represented by her memories, which she tries to repress: “the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (42); “she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (6); but to no avail: “[u]nfortunately her brain was devious” (6). It is enough to say such a simple statement that the baby ghost was “[n]o more powerful than the way [Sethe] loved her (4)”, and

she immediately remembers “[t]he welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones” (4), that is, her paying by her body with “her knees wide open as any grave” (5) for the seven letters on the tombstone, adding a new traumatic scene to the several others where the female body is shamed. This is how trauma becomes a “story of a wound that cries out” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4) and tries to tell something which is otherwise not available to consciousness, something unspeakable: “every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable” (58).

Hence what is unspeakable has to gain a human form in order to be visible, to be able to cry out. Thus, the repressed traumatic memories of Sethe become ‘speakable’ by assuming an inherently paradox entity: the form of a living dead, a ghost, which is by its paradoxical nature the perfect metaphor for a traumatic wound. In addition, as Bousoon observes, the dead daughter’s return as a ghost does not only convey “the peculiar dissociative quality”, that is, “the depersonalization and derealization” of trauma, “but also the haunting quality of traumatic and humiliated memory” (152). That is, Sethe and her whole family have been, metaphorically speaking, haunted by the traumatic past, but Morrison also represents this haunting literally: first by the ghost of the dead daughter, then by the appearance of Beloved. Similarly, the whole African

American community is haunted both ways as well. As Baby Suggs points out to Sethe, “[n]ot a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby” (5).

Furthermore, trauma has an endless impact on the survivor's life. The question which naturally emerges is the question of whether the trauma is the encounter with death, or the experience of survival. Caruth suggests that there is a “kind of double telling” at the core of stories of trauma: an “oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (*Unclaimed* 7). Through this approach, trauma can be understood not just as a consequence of a destructive event, but also as an “enigma of survival” (58). Therefore, trauma is by its nature paradoxical and incomprehensible, possessing both destructiveness and excessiveness at its core; a survival which necessarily entails guilt. For Sethe, who originally planned to kill all her children and then herself in order to be together ‘on the other side’, killing her own children and surviving the death of her child are shown equally unbearable, so much so that killing her child and surviving it becomes part of her identity. *Beloved*’s character can be understood as the embodiments of this guilt of survival; the crisis of life. What is more, Morrison stated that the only person who had the right to judge Sethe was the daughter she killed (*Darling* 248).

Thus, Beloved naturally inserted herself into the text as the only character from whom Sethe needed to get absolution, but was unable to in the end.

As a trauma survivor, it is only natural that Sethe is unable to resume “the normal course of her life” (Herman 37) due to the fact that she “finds herself caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma, between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all” (Herman 47). She either represses everything with hard work or relives random traumatic sequences in her memories, and her scarred back, which cannot feel pain, represents her emotional numbness. For a traumatized individual, “even normally safe environments may come to feel dangerous, for the survivor can never be assured that she will not encounter some reminder of the trauma”, which “repeatedly interrupts” (Herman 37): even such safe images as trees can and do induce painful memories. As a result, Sethe cannot enjoy her present life (hence she is blind to colors) and cannot plan for a future until Paul D’s arrival, who first initiates a change in the frozen lives of the women in 124 Bluestone Road. This interruption of the past is embodied and personified in Beloved, who is similar to the intrusive memory trauma victims always suffer from: a memory which, eventually, needs to be addressed and incorporated into the consciousness in order for the victims to be able to resume their lives.

Still, it is very important to differentiate between the ghost of the dead daughter, whose name is never given in the text (after all, there are certain things in a traumatic event that remain hidden forever) and who haunts 124 from the young woman around twenty years old who suddenly appears in flesh and blood in front of Sethe's house. The two have very distinct narrative functions in the text and they are certainly not the same entities: rather, Beloved is the return of Sethe's dead daughter *and* something else, as Denver senses it quite accurately. Also, her arrival is foreshadowed by several signs, which are often used in Morrison's prose. The first of such signs is when Denver sees "a white dress holding on to" (35) her mother, and senses that her sister, the baby ghost must be planning something. The next sign is the smell of dying roses on the day of the carnival that "made [people] a little dizzy and very thirsty" (47). The carnival itself also foreshadows the mixture of natural and supernatural, as it is a place of 'miracles', and accompanied with the smell of the dying roses, it effectively signals the return of the dead. Next, Here Boy, the dog who was almost killed by the ghost becomes missing the instant Beloved appears, and only returns at the end of the novel, thus reassuring Paul D about Beloved's absence. Finally, upon seeing Beloved Sethe immediately has an urge to urinate, losing as much water as when she was giving birth to Denver, an event she also recalls. This symbolic birth of Beloved as a grown-up young woman and all the

other omens are inherent and deep-rooted in African American cosmology, utilized most overtly in *A Mercy*, and Morrison's design to restore and give back credibility to African American belief system is quite apparent here. Commenting on the magical quality of her work, Morrison also stated that it is simply rooted in "the way the worlds was for me and for the black people I knew", and besides a very practical way they lived their lives full of hardships, "there was this other knowledge or perception, always discredited but there" (C. Davis 226). Here, apart from employing these foreshadowing devices as narrative strategies, Morrison also rewrites history from a different perspective, condemned as "irrational" (Jones and Vinson 181) simply because it was different from how white Americans perceived it. The firm belief in the existence of ghosts is, after all, what makes the whole narrative possible to be perceived as a piece of realist fiction; it is indeed a belief shared by the majority of the characters: "[y]ou know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground" (188), tells Ella to Stamp Paid, who cannot deny it either.

Thus, after several signs foretelling her arrival, Beloved appears as a fully grown and "fully dressed young woman walk[ing] out of the water" with "new skin, lineless and smooth" (50), suffering from the aftereffects of such a great journey between the living and the dead. She is a newborn 'baby' physically with her lineless skin, which "was flawless except three vertical

scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like ... baby hair” (51). Obviously the marks of Sethe’s fingernails, there are several indications for the characters to guess the identity of their visitor, most importantly her name; yet only Denver understands from the instant Beloved introduces herself who she really is. The reason is that Denver is the only one who at the moment really misses the baby ghost, her only playmate and companion in the long hours her mother works outside of the confines of Bluestone Road 124, which Denver scarcely ever leaves on her own until the very end of the narrative. In addition, she is the one who used to be the closest to the ghost, because she drank her sister’s blood mixed with Sethe’s milk, and she is the one who has the most inclination to face the past instead of constantly burying it.

The reasons why Morrison chose to portray Beloved as an adult can be several, the most obvious one among them being that Sethe’s dead daughter would have been around that age as well. However, by using a grown-up woman the author can also explore the collective trauma of women slaves through her character, and in a way she can reconstruct how slave women were treated as only objects for breeding livestock. Although it is undeniable that Beloved behaves as a child in several ways (e. g. her preference for sweet food, her egocentrism and overall selfishness or her constant need of maternal love

and care), and as a traumatized child at that, she definitely has the characteristics of a woman, too. Paul D is the only one who immediately senses her glowing, and it is him Beloved ends up using to relive the shameful sexual encounters slave women were subjected to at night, but this time not with men who do not know or care about her name, only about their own desire. That is why she commands Paul D to “touch me on the inside part and call me my name” (116), which he does, saying softly then shouting “Red heart” (117) over and over again.¹³ Red heart refers both to the death of Sethe’s daughter and Paul D’s tobacco tin instead of his red heart, and through this reconstruction of a sexual encounter, both Beloved and Paul D get closer to facing their own respective traumas by reliving it once again.

Also, by portraying Beloved as an adult makes it possible to perceive her as more than the vengeful ghost of Sethe’s murdered daughter. In her monologue at the end of Part II, she recounts memories even from before the Middle Passage and also the passage itself, which shows that she possesses a kind of collective memory of slavery. In fact, the first institutions of the slave trade were the so-called “factories”, where slave traders collected the captives brought from the interior of the continent. Here began “a process of total disorientation and disintegration of the normal social patterns” (Shenton 131) of

¹³ Obviously, calling her Beloved would not help, as she already experienced being called like that by several other men.

the captives, mixing them in a way that they were unable to maintain their previous cultural patterns. In addition, the existing hostilities between African tribes were successfully exploited, making organized opposition increasingly improbable.

After the preparations for the transportation, during which slaves had already been victimized and many of them had perished, came the transportation by slave ships, the so-called Middle Passage, which can be understood as “the very horror of the whole experience” (Shenton 131) of slavery. Between 1500 and 1850, more than ten million people were transported from Africa this way, and many had died before arriving at America. In fact, even if only one third of the slaves survived, the journey was regarded as a success, with a 200-300 percent profit. The traders were mostly European companies, but Brazil and North America have also participated in the slave business, which was an important part of all the respective country’s income, especially in Britain. The slave ships were tightly packed, slaves were shackled, often naked, and there was a lack of food and horrendous hygienic circumstances, which led to epidemics on board from time to time. The conditions were so ghastly that the stench of the slave ships could be recognized from five miles away (Bly 180). Due to the intolerable conditions, several slaves tried to resist, mostly by refusing to eat, in which case they were

tortured and force-fed, or committing suicide, oftentimes by jumping into the water. Both is narrated by Beloved in her monologue. In fact, there was a belief among slaves that those who committed suicide by jumping into the sea would successfully return to their homes and families (Bly 181). Interestingly, Beloved also crosses the border between the living and the dead by traveling through water.

After their arrival to the American continent, slaves were denied their language, religion and culture as well as the possibility of forming lasting relationships. Still, survivors of the slave ships “memorialized the trans-atlantic passage in African American cultural memory, passed on and re-remembered [it] from generation to generation. Denied a voice, exiled from human history by the master's monologic narrative, they remade, reimagined, and retold American history in the many voices of the black experience” (Hayden 17-18). Beloved’s monologue is precisely such an attempt, along with the memories of Sethe’s mother and Nan. Also, it is interesting to note that Beloved’s monologue, location wise set in an in-between state of two continents, but also between life and death, “wrestles with meaning as it confronts the abject both outside (the ‘objective’ experience of the Middle Passage) and inside (the ‘subjective’ exploration of the pre-Oedipal)” (Hayden 20).

The way Beloved recounts the passage is thus a deeply traumatized and fragmented monologue, relying on sensory word-pictures: “All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are couching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead” (210); “those able to die are in a pile ... the little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push them through with poles ... they fall into the sea which is the color of the bread ... the woman with my face is in the sea” (211). Here she recounts being transported with her mother in a ship like human cattle, where people were forced to crouch in their own excrement, many of whom died during the journey; how white people pushed the piles of dead people into the water; and how her mother committed suicide by jumping into the water herself. Clearly, as Beloved is “[l]ocked in traumatic, dissociated memory, the experience remains fixed, frozen in time” (Bouson 153): it is always now, always present. Also, due its very traumatic nature, it can never form a linear, logical narrative. Another reason for this is that Beloved died as a child, who was obviously still unable to comprehend time and even a separate identity from her mother, hence Beloved constantly emphasizes that Sethe has “her face” (211). Although it seems Sethe only regards Beloved as her murdered daughter returning to her mother, Denver also admits to Paul D at the end of the novel that besides being her sister, “[a]t times

I think she was—more” (266); she is clearly aware of the fact, just like the reader, that Beloved cannot only be Sethe’s resurrected daughter, supported by the aforementioned monologue.

Thus, Beloved is at once an adult and a child, both mentally and physically. In fact, children normally achieve “a secure sense of autonomy by forming inner representations of trustworthy and dependable caretakers, representations that can be evoked mentally in moments of distress (Herman 107). However, in Sethe’s first daughter’s case this development was fractured, which is represented by Beloved’s neediness regarding Sethe, her jealousy and anger over Sethe spending time with Paul D instead of her, her fear every day that Sethe will not return, and most poetically in her fragmented monologue. Also, neglected or abused children oftentimes feel as if their bodies were falling apart, or if they were not present at all, and both of these sensations are invoked in the narrative: the first when Beloved distresses over the crumbling of her body, the second when she literally disappears for a while in the shed, at the place of the original traumatic event.

Also, the ghost wants to remind people of the injustice she has suffered from. In Caruth’s understanding of Lacan’s interpretation on Freud’s narrative of the dream of the burning child,¹⁴ it is about listening to the address of

¹⁴ A short summary of the dream is as follows: a father had been watching his child’s sick-bed for days and nights. After the child died, he went to the adjoining room to lie down, but left the

another's trauma, another's wound; listening to the other who demands to be seen and heard. Witnessing and surviving trauma comes with an "unavoidable imperative" (*Unclaimed* 104), like the child waking up his father in his dream with his question about seeing.¹⁵ It is "the child of its irreducible inaccessibility and otherness, who says to the father: *wake up, leave me, survive; survive to tell the story of my burning*" (105).

While trying to interpret *Beloved* from this approach, there are many observations which can be made. Firstly, the ghost (before taking on a human form) demands people around her to acknowledge her existence and do not forget what happened. However, as quoted before, Sethe and Baby Suggs try hard not to remember. On the other hand, Denver's hearing is given back when she hears her dead sister crawling on the stairs. Because the others do not want to remember, they become imprisoned in time, unable to go on. Also, the baby ghost taking a human form can be understood as a fulfillment of her desire to be heard, because as simply a ghost Sethe still represses the traumatic past. But by

door open in a way that he could see into the room where the child's body was laid out. There was an old man asked to watch over the body. After a few hours of sleep, the father dreamt that his child was standing next to his bed, caught him by the arm, and whispered to him: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" He woke up and immediately noticed a bright light coming from the room where the child's body was, ran there and found out that the old man had fallen asleep and that his beloved child's arm had been burnt by a candle.

¹⁵ In this interpretation, the father, who would rather have slept in order to see his dead child alive once again in his dream, is woken up by this same child who wants his father to see him, but not inside the dream and inside of death, which is the only place he can be truly seen from now on, but from the outside.

assuming a human form, the dead daughter can finally make her mother and people around her acknowledge her existence and tell the story of her death.

Thus, Beloved wants someone to hear, to see her wound and remember her story and the story of slave mothers and daughters in general. In order to do this, quite similarly to the burning child in the dream, she commands Sethe to tell stories, who soon “learn[s] the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling”, which “became a way to feed her”. Quite tellingly, Sethe also starts to enjoy her stories, which become an “unexpected pleasure” (58) for her. Through this, she also learns things about her past she thought she has forgotten: most importantly, her mother and the fact that they spoke another language and came directly from Africa. Through this process, Sethe also faces her own past and her own inheritance, coming from a deported African woman who was marked for life and eventually executed. One of Morrison’s observations is that no one can be a free human being without knowing their past, thus Beloved’s obsession with storytelling causes Sethe to relive several of her deliberately forgotten memories. Ultimately, Beloved succeeds, and finally reliving the story of her daughter's death and her own survival is what gives Sethe, too, a chance to reclaim her own life. Furthermore, the ghost Beloved is the catalyst for Denver and Paul D: she forces “Paul D to confront the shame and pain of the powerlessness of a man in slavery, and enable[s]

Denver to deal with her mother's history as a slave” (Krumholz 400). In addition, she also becomes the incentive for the whole community to face their repressed guilt over betraying Baby Suggs and her family, which they try to mask as an aversion to excessive pride. The final exorcism scene will be discussed in details in the last subchapter.

The ghost is all at once the spirit of the past; the resurrection of the ancestral spirit of African-American heritage (especially in the final scene); the haunting presence of the repressed memory of slavery and collective trauma, and the personal trauma and guilt of Sethe. All of these and even beyond, *Beloved* encompasses several layers of meaning: she is a signifier that cannot be pinned down, hence maintaining “[t]he sense of fracture which is at the heart of the book” (Peach 102). She defies categorization by playing the different roles of sister, daughter, lover, and finally, mother and by being the ghost of the dead daughter but also of something else: she “can never be fully conceptualized because she is continually in a state of transition” (Heinze 208). That is, she “moves from one plane of reference to another, literally destabilizing the novel” (Peach 102), which is already destabilized by the several different narratives included in it.

Moreover, *Beloved* shows a different identity to everyone involved with her, embodying both their worst fears and their desires, hence ultimately she

reflects the identities of the other characters instead of possessing her own. She subverts the image of the daughter, who comes back to reclaim her mother all for herself, and finally transforms her mother to a little child while she herself becomes a mother instead, until even Denver cannot “tell who [is] who” (241). Also, she subverts the image of the female slave whose body was used by others by forcing Paul D to call her name and have a sexual relationship with her against his own will. She asserts her authority by punishing Sethe and abusing Paul D and banishing him from her territory. She stands above good or bad, just as the deed of Sethe cannot be judged by neither the reader nor the community, and although she awakens painful memories, in the end it is through her haunting and her exorcism that mourning becomes possible for all the major characters and for the community as well. As Morrison also observed, “what makes one write ... is something in the past that is haunting” and through which the author (as well as the reader) needs to “rediscover the past” (Jones and Vinson 171). In regard to *Beloved*, she chose to represent haunting quite literally; more than the personal guilt of her protagonist, it is the past of slavery both African Americans and the white majority need to address as part of their inheritance.

III.2 Language as a Communal Resource

As Peach summarizes, the key features of Morrison's use of language are "its vividness, its use of color, its sensuality, the specificity of observation, its metaphoric mode of enunciation, its folk creativity, its cathartic qualities, the rhythm and the music, and ... the way in which community memory is not accessed through but stored in language" (134). Thus, language and community are strongly linked in Morrison's prose, who deliberately turns to African American tradition and use of language as a way of inspiration. Also, it is of central importance how her characters can express themselves. Language is always part of a power structure, which is why several characters in *Beloved* feel the need to change their names, stop using English altogether or instead of speaking, express themselves in songs which are capable of breaking "an enforced silence"; for instance, all songs sung at "Sweet Home are expressions of a desire for freedom" (Rigney 9) otherwise unspeakable, while the songs sung in the prison camp function as means of survival. This creative use of language is naturally connected to the language of trauma as well in the sense that it shows the fracture and the limitations of what language can express. In this chapter, first the African American qualities of Morrison's prose will be addressed in connection with her vivid and sensual language so appropriate for

magical realism, then how language itself is problematized for the characters in *Beloved*. Finally, how history is reconstructed through the utilization of black oral storytelling tradition and the subversion of already existing narratives will be explained.

Trying to recreate “the way black people talk”, the “oral quality” of her novels is a deliberate attempt on the part of Morrison. She sees the key characteristic of African American speech not in “the use of non-standard grammar”, but rather in “the manipulation of metaphor”, and how the stories are told “as though they are going in several directions at the same time” (McKay 152), which is the reason behind her fragmentary narrative style. Another one of her proclaimed intentions is “to capture the vast imagination of black people”, which means including the supernatural elements juxtaposed to the realistic ones, because “all the parts of living are on equal footing. Birds and butterflies cry, and it is not surprising or upsetting” (McKay 153), but rather it makes the world larger and all-encompassing. Since Morrison aims to incorporate African American beliefs and imagination, naturally she portrays the supernatural in the same way as she describes the real: the two are essentially the same in her prose. Most importantly, Morrison believes that language is a crucial element in an African American community and also in what makes her own style distinctive:

The language must be careful and must appear effortless. It must not sweat. It must suggest and be provocative at the same time. It is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It’s a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher’s: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. (LeClair 123)

Thus, language is a lot more than a form of communication: it is art, a source of beauty and joy, and also a “method of looking at life and the individual’s place within that culture” (Atkinson 12). To understand what each word means, it is necessary to perceive the correct cultural context, since meaning in the oral tradition African American English belongs greatly depends on communal knowledge and beliefs, non-verbal elements, tone, intonation and context besides the words itself. Therefore, language also identifies who belongs to the community and who does not. For instance, Jadine in *Tar Baby* or Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon* repeatedly reacts differently from what would be expected by the community, which signals that they are outside of it.

Also, particularly in *Song of Solomon*, the community creates different names for places—naming being a power to define and redefine—, which also differentiates between those who belong and those who do not. Thus, the communal aspect of language is notably emphasized by Morrison in several ways. What forges the community is also the existence of a shared collective memory, a kind of “living archive of African American culture” (Atkinson 23), which is strongly connected to the act of storytelling analyzed below.

One of the examples of the African American oral tradition in the texts of Morrison is the countless references to music, dance, and non-verbal communication in general. When Sethe’s mother is first mentioned in the novel, Sethe claims that she “remembered only song and dance” (30), but that memory she kept vividly: “[o]h but when they sang. And oh but when they danced They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did” (31). Music and dancing, that is, the body was the only way those people could truly express themselves in an oppressed society, where they were forbidden to speak (even literally, by using the bit): but while dancing, their own traditional culture came alive, transforming them into something bigger than simple slaves on a white plantation. This was the only way they could preserve their tradition, and through it their humanity and freedom, which is the reason why they seemed so

different to Sethe when they danced. In addition, later Sethe understands that the cause of her not remembering her childhood well is that a different language was used by the slaves, who came directly from Africa. Sethe lost this language, too, which, according to Morrison, is the worst that can happen to a human being. Due to the loss of language, she lost her memories: she became deprived of her inheritance and her connection to her own mother was severed, which could also lead to her excessive maternal love later on. This is supported by the fact that she never learned how to nurse a baby, as there were no women ever giving birth at Sweet Home other than herself, and she had no mother to ask or from whom to learn; a strong disruption of communal tradition, where young women could always learn from the older ones regarding these issues.

Apart from Sethe's mother, Paul D also repeatedly expresses himself through songs. At Sweet Home "yearning fashioned every note", but the songs he learnt at the prison camp in Georgia "were flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding" (40).¹⁶ However, these songs do not fit Bluestone Road 124, so he makes up a new song while repeating "Bare feet and chamomile sap, / Took off my shoes; took off my hat" (40), expressing his desire for Sethe and a new life with her. As for Beloved, her ghostly nature is also represented by her "gravelly voice", in which a "song [seem] to lie ...

¹⁶ In Morrison's prose, when metaphors are not rooted in nature, they usually signal something painful and inhumane, like the nails here.

outside music ..., with a cadence not like theirs” (60). Interestingly, Amy Denver can also convey her feelings the best through songs: even though she is white, she is oppressed the same way black slaves were. Finally, sound, already existing before speech was born, is crucial in the final exorcism scene, analyzed in the last subchapter.

In fact, the biggest problem surrounding language in *Beloved* is that it necessarily reflects the oppressors’ notions, philosophy and culture; and as such, “ownership of body and authorship of language” (Lawrence 232) are strongly linked in the novel. The most telling example of it is when Sixo gets into an argument with schoolteacher and very cleverly tells him that he is only “improving [his] property” by eating a shoat. Nevertheless, he gets beaten just “to show ... that definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined” (190). Slaves are only ‘defined’ in this society by their white masters, which is also a question Paul D ponders upon repeatedly: whether they were really men, or whether it was only because Mr. Garner had said so, who was “tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men” (11). This declaration is obviously paradoxical by its nature: the slaves Garner believes he *owns* cannot be real men, and you cannot make somebody a man simply by calling him so. The problem of ownership regarding one’s own body is thus “related to that of authority over discourse” and the “bodily and linguistic

disempowerment” (Lawrence 233) is strongly intertwined. As both Mr. Garner and schoolteacher own the bodies of their slaves, they have the power and authority to define who (or what) they are: since schoolteacher defines them in a radically different way, as creatures somewhere between a human and an animal, they have to either lose their humanity or flee from Sweet Home.

Indeed, schoolteacher always compares them to animals and expresses his sorrow over losing a slave only as losing valuable property, which is why stealing Sethe’s milk is completely justified in his view. The main problem with him is not that he is a crueler master than Mr. Garner was, but rather that his definition of the slaves degrades them in such a way that is unacceptable and thus results in Sethe’s excessive response. As she explains, “anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were” (251), that is, deprive you of your self-respect and identity. Naturally, Sethe wants to protect her children from this process: “[w]hites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing”, and would rather die with them than let them, the “part of her that was clean” (251) see degraded into animals and property. Similarly, Sixo refuses to speak English after he realizes his language can only be inferior to that of the master’s, which he explains as “there [is] no future in English” (25). No future, that is, no

chance to articulate his thoughts as a human being who matters. Even while he dies, he only laughs and sings, which Paul D cannot join since he does not know the words; he has not recognized yet that the words do not matter under such circumstances.

As a result of being the language of the oppressor, and also in connection with how the fracture caused by trauma cannot be represented linguistically—these two features of language are interwoven in the narrative: after all, trauma is caused by those who define—, language is often contradictory in the novel. For instance, the box in Georgia “drove [Paul D] crazy so he would not lose his mind” (41), and Beloved is “too hungry to eat” (211) on the slave ship. Regarding past trauma, Sethe and Paul D do not have “word-shapes for” (99) it, and when Ella wants to assess the situation of Sethe, she “listen[s] for the holes—the things the fugitives [do] not say; the questions they [do] not ask”, and “for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind” (92). Thus, language by itself is completely unable to represent the world African American slaves lived in, and they had to learn not to rely on it.

Another example of the importance of language for the characters in their pursuit of freedom is their names. The two characters who name themselves while refusing the names given by their white owners are Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid. Baby Suggs, holy (the ‘holy’ standing for her role in the

community) is called Jenny Whitlow on her sales ticket, but she insists on Suggs after her husband's surname, and Baby since that was how Suggs called her. Even though Mr. Garner tells her that "Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro", which again shows how whites try to define and control the African American even after they are legally free, Baby Suggs insists on keeping the name of the man "she claimed", since "how could he find her ... if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name" (142). The word 'claimed' is also quite telling in this context: although not the father of her children (not even Halle's), and his whereabouts are unknown, he was the man Baby Suggs accepted as her husband in a system where marriage was impossible. Claiming anybody in that position is pointless: Baby Suggs lost all her children except Halle, too, because even mothers were unable to claim their children for themselves. Thus, Baby's claiming of a husband and her assertion of their bond is by itself a subversion of the system of slavery.

Furthermore, the case of Stamp Paid is also connected to this problem of claiming someone you cannot claim as long as you are only the 'defined'. "Born Joshua", Stamp Paid "renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense that she did not kill anybody, thereby himself" (184), and as a result of this ultimate sacrifice, this "gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything". This debtlessness freed him and

even others, since “he extended his debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery” (185). This radically new understanding of debt and the gesture of freeing himself by paying any obligation to humanity in misery is what is symbolized by the name Stamp Paid, who was able to forge his own identity by ultimately defying his master through the act of naming. Also, as Rigney argues, Morrison implies by this episode that “[a]ll African Americans are, in essence, ‘Stamp Paid’” (41), that is, all of them already paid their debt in misery.

Similarly, Sethe’s name given by her mother is also an act of defiance, of subversion. She (whose name the readers never find out—she is linked to another language, long-forgotten and buried) gave birth to many children from the crew on the ship on its way to America and later too “from more whites”; and, most significantly, she threw them away “[w]ithout names” (62). But to Sethe her mother “gave the name of the black man”, the only one “[s]he put her arms around” (62). Sethe’s mother, just like Ella, defies the system where her gender and nursing abilities are only used in order to increase the property of the white men; she only accepts her child born out of love and her own free choice. (Also, interestingly, both Sethe’s mother and Ella had committed infanticide as well; the difference is they did it out of hate, not love.) In addition, Sethe also names her daughter Denver after another person, Amy Denver, who

made it possible for Sethe to reach the Ohio. Naming after someone is generally an expression of gratitude, but in this case also a gesture of free will: naming after another person who is among the oppressed is again a rebellious act. On the other hand, “the act of naming another reflects a desire to regulate and therefore to control” (Rigney 44), which has its own ambiguous side as well. Matriarchal power, so central in all of Morrison’s narratives, can be the source of life, tradition, culture and community, but it can also be oppressive or ‘too thick’: for instance, Pilate’s love for Hagar in *Song of Solomon* or Eva’s power to control her children in *Sula* are equally problematic, similarly to Sethe’s love for her children and her desire to control and regulate their lives.

In addition, the name ‘Beloved’ is also worth to note. Although not the real name of the dead daughter, Sethe was deeply impressed by the two words ‘Dearly Beloved’ during the funeral. Even though she did not pay attention to the rest of the sermon, the reader knows that it would continue more or less as ‘we are gathered here today to mourn’, which is a call for witnesses. As Atkinson argues, the “[r]eaffirmation of community is one of the hallmarks of Black English” and the systems in it “call for the participants to reaffirm their cultural roots, community, and themselves” (22). One of these systems is called “Witness/Testify” (22), where the speaker verbally expresses being witnessed something shared by the community, who in response need to testify and thus

validate the experience. It is an act of “social empathy”, where the participants are required to testify, that is, to “tell, pass on, share the event with others” (23). Thus, *Beloved*’s name is interwoven with this act of shared mourning and witnessing, just like the novel itself functions as an imperative to bear witness, summoning the reader as well to take part in this process of testifying. What allows the novel to function like this is Morrison’s usage of the rhetoric of Witness/Testify and the oral storytelling tradition of African American people, explained above.

What should be noted as well regarding *Beloved*’s name is how Morrison in the epigraph also manipulates the text of the Bible in order to befit her own intentions, as opposed to how it was manipulated to support racist ideologies. She quotes from the New Testament (*Romans 9:25*) the following four lines: “I will call them my people, / which were not my people; / and her beloved, /which was not my beloved”, referring to the African Americans suffering from slavery, and calling all her readers to witness and testify the fate of those “Sixty Million and More” in her epigraph. Also, by citing from the New Testament a “passage that echoes a passage from the Old Testament”, Morrison problematizes the relation between past and present, and, most importantly, “thematizes the importance of historical reclamation and

repossession” (Henderson 82). Similarly to how Jehovah reclaimed the Jews after the apostasy, Morrison reclaims the ancestors of the slaves in her novel.

While *Beloved* problematizes language as it is used in the dominant discourse, it also questions history as such. The novel itself “reclaims a number of occluded narratives around slavery” (Peach 98), for instance it refutes the myth of the benevolent master and also the perception of the North as a symbol of freedom or the success of the Civil War at emancipating slaves: “[t]he War had been over for four or five years then, but nobody white or black seemed to know it” (52). The characteristic style of Morrison, that is, her polyphonic narration successfully explores how official narratives were created by “bury[ing] alternative interpretations, thus serving to silence other voices” (Peach 94). Precisely for this reason, for Morrison history is not interesting in itself. Even when she writes about very specific locations in a definite time, for instance on Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance in *Jazz*, she does not include almost any of the important historical events, famous names and artistic accomplishments of that time. To the reader she does not want “to reveal an already established reality (literary or historical) that he or she and [the author] agree[s] upon beforehand”, because her aim is not to “assume or exercise that kind of authority”, which she regards “patronizing” (*Memory* 388). In addition, she explains why she tries not to depend on Western literary tradition, only on

folk tales: she does not want to conform the reader. On the contrary, Morrison's agenda is to subvert this traditional comfort and to make the reader experience "that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination" and to react "as an illiterate or preliterate reader would". She confesses focusing on creating discomfort and unease in the readers to make them "rely on another body of knowledge" (*Memory* 387), which fits well with the magical realm of magical realism. Similarly to several postcolonial authors employing magical realism in their texts, Morrison also wants to create the language and history of her own community:

If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West—discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment". (*Memory* 388)

In this regard, Morrison's standpoint is very similar to that of Carpentier writing on the specific marvelous real in Latin America. In accordance with his opinion, Morrison also wants to "reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-

American culture” “faithfully” (*Memory* 388). Furthermore, she also has a straightforward political aim, that is, bearing witness—the same expression oftentimes used in connection with the survivors of trauma:

If my work is to be functional to the group (to the village, as it were) then it must bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded; it must make it possible to prepare for the present and live it out, and it must do that not by avoiding problems and contradictions but by examining them; it should not even attempt to solve social problems, but it should certainly try to clarify them. (*Memory* 389)

Concerning *Beloved*, a novel which is dedicated to “Sixty Million and more”, that is, to all African-Americans who suffered from slavery, several things should be noted. First, bearing witness and not averting but examining problems is what differentiates Morrison’s interest in history from that of the history written by the dominant culture. Her novels are not the fictionalized versions of monumental events, although there are certain allusions to historical facts. However, many of them are not mentioned in mainstream newspapers and do not become part of the public record of history. If a person “had a

healthy baby, or outran the street mob”, or “had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated”, it “could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper” (156). Rather, these events were preserved only in a black collective memory sustained by people such as Baby Suggs, Ella or Stamp Paid. There are only fleeting references to the grand narrative of history in *Beloved*: “[n]o more discussions, stormy or quiet, about the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, ... the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio, and the other weighty issues” (173). Not that these events are unimportant, but in Morrison’s view they are not enough for the history of African Americans. On the other hand, unrecorded violence against them should be remembered as well: “Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults” (180), and the list continues. Thus, she questions history as such and makes the reader contemplate on what is missing in recorded history from the realities of African American life, similarly to how Ella was listening to the silences in Sethe’s words.

The narrative strategy Morrison employs in order to include several different discourses hence questioning the existence of one grand narrative, and

also to make the reader participate in the creative process is the oral storytelling tradition she was grown up with. She explains that her aim is to “haunt” readers, and argues that this haunting is a “parallel” or “outgrowth of” the “oral tradition”. There people used to “tell the same story again and again”, which could be changed by the individual’s contribution to it either by “emphasiz[ing] special things”, commenting on it or making it up “as it goes along” (McKay 146). These stories used to be “constantly being retold” and “imagined within a framework” “in the black community” (McKay 153), which process Morrison recreates in her prose. Her aim is to make the reader participate in the story similarly to how people used to listen to a storyteller (or believers to a preacher at a sermon), hence her argument is that stories are “never the property of the teller” (Jones and Vinson 176), but belong to the community. This is also the reason behind leaving the endings of her novels deliberately ambiguous and open: there are new “choices” and “possibilities” for the characters due their experience, but the final decision is theirs to make—or the readers’, who “have to think” (David 232) about them, which is also a way of haunting. That is what Morrison means by her novels being “community oriented” (Jones and Vinson 177), and she calls it “one of the major characteristics of black literature”: “the participation of the *other*, that is, the audience, the reader” (David 232).

Interestingly, Morrison thus reclaims the identity of a storyteller as a novelist, and states that black literature is closer to the ancient oral storytelling tradition. According to Benjamin, who understands the novelist as a counterpart of the storyteller, in the modern world memory and human experience have become impossible to share, thus the novel takes the place of other forms of prose literature, such as the fairy tale or the legend, and “it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it” (87). The storyteller, who uses his or her own experience to tell a story (or an experience reported by others), by the act of telling the story “makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (87). However, the novel is linked with the isolated individual, who cannot counsel others nor can they be counselled. In this respect, it can be stated that Morrison’s aim is to revive the storyteller (of the African American heritage); not by a naïve belief that experience is, after all, linguistically representable, but rather by creating a language which also shows the gaps, silences and the failures of representation.

This storytelling also appears in the novel itself, when Denver tells the story of her birth to Beloved, her “monologue becom[ing] ... a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved’s interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved” (78). This scene is the perfect metaphor of the relationship between reader and writer, storyteller and listener according to

Morrison. In addition, while recreating the story, due to *Beloved*'s insistence "[t]he dark quilt with two orange patches was there with them" (78), which again alludes to the creation from different materials, that is, from different viewpoints. Also, a quilt as a traditional feminine art form also refers to the silenced voices of the oppressed who can now be given their own voice.

III.3 Circular Time and the Haunted House Revisited

As a trauma narrative, naturally the place of the original traumatic event (the haunted house of 124 as well as Sweet Home) and the past are central in the narrative. In addition, as the past is unspeakable, it resurfaces again and again in the text, creating a circular temporality in the novel. Concerning the structure of Morrison's historical novels, Peterson notes that they are structured "recursively: ... the narration of the present events is continually interrupted by the telling of "background" stories" (205). This structure can help to understand what Morrison thinks about history and also the importance of memory in her texts. Naturally, there is also a connection with trauma narratives in this regard. Also, Peterson argues that in *Jazz* the title of the novel can be understood as "the model for her historical reconstructive project" (210), jazz being a genre which also revisits its own past and claims what is useful for further

development by repeating the melody with subtle variations and by leaving room for creativity and improvisation. Interestingly, this kind of structure can be located both in *The Guest* and *Welcome*: these novels all want to revisit and reconstruct history in a way which can be meaningful for the present. Or, in other words used by Derrida: “inheritance is always the reaffirmation of a debt, but a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation” (92), in which case debt is the historical past still haunting the living, embodied by the ghosts in the texts.

One of the most prominent features of the narrative is Sethe’s uncommon understanding of space, time and the past. First of all, she does not believe in the passing of time. As she confesses to Denver, it is “hard for [her] to believe in it”, since while “[s]ome things ... pass on”, “[s]ome things just stay”. What happened even once does not disappear: “places are still there”, and even if a house burns down, the “picture of it stays ... out there, in the world” (36). This picture can be seen and experienced not only by those participating in it, but by outsiders as well; thus, they are images existing in reality. Experiencing these past events that Sethe calls ‘rememory’ in the narrative can be the source of life-force or can induce a contemplation beneficial for the individual or the community, just as positive past memories give strength to people. For instance, when Sethe needs to think about Paul D and what his arrival means in her life, she goes back to the Clearing in order to at “least

listen to the spaces that the long-ago singing left behind” (89), and the women, when they go to Sethe’s house to face the ghost, what they first see is “not Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves. Younger, stronger” (258) and happy in the healing and loving presence of Baby Suggs. In other words, they immediately rememory how their community used to be before it was fractured, and they can gain power and strength needed for the exorcism from this recollection. Furthermore, when Paul D returns to 124 and goes up to the room he has shared with Sethe, he “leave[s] the image of himself firmly in place on the narrow bed” (270) as a reminder and also a wish for a future together. Hence rememory has its positive function in the life of the ex-slaves, but more often than not it drains their strength needed for survival. When Paul D arrived, he also added “new pictures and old rememories” to Sethe that “broke her heart” (95), like how Halle descended into madness after witnessing Sethe’s degradation and Paul D’s own stories of suffering.

Therefore, Sethe, just like African Americans in general, tries not to remember the horrible traumatic memories suffered as a result of slavery, thus constantly represses her memories and works hard in order to ignore these reappearing images: “[w]orking, working dough. Nothing better than to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past” (73). On the one hand, this strategy is understandable and most probably necessary for survival, at least in the initial

stages of freedom, right after the countless traumatic events experienced by the slaves, which would otherwise overwhelm and shatter their minds. On the other hand, not addressing these wounds on the long run destroys the lives of the victims. As illustrated in the novel, quite paradoxically, Sethe's "brain was not interested in the future" because it was "loaded with the past" to such an extent that "it left her no room to imagine ... the next day" (70). While the act of 'rememory' is precisely what she fights against, along with Paul D, Baby Suggs, and the rest of the community, in reality what they do not want to (or cannot) recognize is that as a result of this same struggle against rememory, they ultimately cannot leave the past behind. Paradoxically, the ghosts of the past need to be conjured up and exorcised in order to be forgotten, and this is the process which is initiated by first Paul D's arrival, then by Beloved.

In the company of Paul D, Sethe feels that "[h]er story [is] bearable because it [is] his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again" (99), which is the only way to fight the traumatic memories. Since Paul D's life is similarly loaded with painful traumatic events, Sethe believes that together they can find the strength to overcome these memories and help each other in the process. Also, he makes Sethe "rediscover her own capacity of bodily sensation and reestablish contact with the outside world that induces such a sensation" (Lawrence 238), thus Sethe can start taking pleasure in things she was unable to

observe before, so deeply she was locked in her painful past. However, either because her feelings and the desire caused by Paul D opens up the way to her repressed memories, triggering Beloved's appearance in a human form, or because Paul D chases off of the baby ghost, Beloved is conjured up. Although her constant nagging for stories forces Sethe to make an effort to recall her past, which results in gaining back the memories of her mother and the story of her name, which is an initial step in reclaiming her identity, the healing process initiated by Paul D is interrupted when he cannot understand Sethe's motives behind the infanticide and leaves the house. Still, for a while it seems that the three women can live happily, though isolated from the community, after Sethe recognizes her dead daughter in Beloved. Consciously, she believes that finally she does not have to "remember" or "explain" (183) anything, because her daughter understands. However, Sethe does the exact opposite she believes; she remembers everything suppressed so far, "her mind ... busy with the things she could forget" (191). It is ultimately through this final, paradoxical but complete memory that she can reconstruct her past and recover her selfhood.

From the aspect of trauma studies, the description of memory quite accurately portrays traumatic memory described in the second chapter. Sethe's uncontrolled memories and her reliving of the traumatic experiences are exactly like the visual memory referred to by survivors of trauma such as memory

“encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images”, “lack[ing] verbal narrative and context”, with an “intense focus on fragmentary sensation, on image without context” (Herman 38). As all trauma survivors, she is “driven by the need to reveal and conceal as she struggles to both remember and not remember” (Bousoon 136), which is captured by the narrative strategies employed by Morrison: fragmentation, repetition and the circular structure of the novel around Sethe’s shameful secret, shown from different perspectives, but still remaining fragmentary to the very end. Also, this narrative structure is in accordance with how magical realist narratives disrupt our sense of time.

In the text, the two time frames of the present in 124 Bluestone Road and the past at Sweet Home (or Georgia and his flight in case of Paul D) are interwoven, and the past continually invades the present. Virtually anything can trigger the emergence of past memories (nature, certain objects, places, words), which results in the constant switch between the narration of the present and the past. Thus, the past is literally present for the characters, as Sethe also explains her daughter. Although the focus of the text is certainly Sethe and her narrative, thus the two main time frames of the novel is Sethe’s life in Sweet Home, culminating in her flight and short-lived happiness, and her barren present almost twenty years after the infanticide, the other characters are presented similarly: they all live at once in the present and the past. Whether Paul D, Ella

or Baby Suggs, virtually all members of the community are haunted by their own past traumas, which results in the special temporal structure of the novel. This narrative strategy, that is, the juxtaposition of two time frames—the dissociated, fragmented past where the survivors are in fact stuck, and the present where life continues without real emotions (hence Ella’s insistence that she does not love anyone)—is the most adequate temporal structure for any trauma narratives, as it captures the sense of time of the survivors of trauma quite accurately. Not surprisingly, all three novels employ somewhat similar strategies: the past always invades the present, that is, there are continuous flashback in all three novels, linear temporality being inappropriate to capture the mind suffering from the aftereffects of trauma and the intrusive traumatic memories (or, from the perspective of magical realism, inappropriate to capture reality).

The “constant circling of the narrative” from past events to the present and then back again is, besides being the result of capturing how trauma locks its victim in a constant reliving of the past, is also connected to the “West African sense of time” (Bowers 212) employed by Morrison, which is by nature cyclical. According to West African organic philosophy, the world is a living entity with phases of becoming, aging and death, after which it is reborn again, hence saying that “[a]nything dead coming back to life hurts” (35) makes

perfect sense, as it is actually possible for the dead to come back to life. Therefore, the circular temporality of the novel, while “enact[ing] the West African perspective”, “reinforces the importance of the past for both the individual and collective psyche” (Bowers 212). On the narrative level, this approach also means that certain events resurface again and again, and the readers start to understand their significance only as the narrative goes on; for instance, Denver’s deafness is first alluded to in the text as: “[Buglar and Howard] had been polite to her during the quiet time” (19), and it is only revealed later that she became deaf because she did not want to hear the answer about the time she had spent in prison with her mother, which she in fact remembered: “it was a thing that had been lying there all along” (102). However, Denver also chose not to remember, but only for a while: significantly, it was the baby ghost who gave back her hearing after two years.

Obviously, the central event of the narrative is Sethe’s infanticide, which is also only alluded to several times before it is described, first using the “four horsemen” (148) as focalizers, then Baby Suggs, then Stamp Paid, before Paul D finally confronts Sethe, giving her a chance to explain her deed. As already mentioned, Sethe’s movement also expresses the temporal structure of the narrative: “[s]he was spinning. Round and Round the room”, Paul D only watching “her drift into view then disappear behind his back, turning like a

slow but steady wheel” (159), which is a perfect metaphor for West African understanding of time as well as storytelling in general. In addition, how Sethe narrates her point of view on the story is in fact very similar how Morrison herself conducts her narratives. From Paul D’s perspective, Sethe’s way of storytelling is comparable to how the reader reacts to the novel *Beloved*:

It made him dizzy. At first it thought it was her spinning. Circling him the way he was circling the subject. ... No, it’s the sound of her voice; it’s too near. ... listening to her was like having a child whisper into your ear so close you could feel its lips form the words you couldn’t make out because they were too close. (161)

Morrison also circles the subject, Sethe’s infanticide and other events, several times, always giving more insights, different perspectives and a deeper understanding of an event that ultimately escapes complete understanding. The narrator is also like a whispering child, telling a haunting tale: incomprehensible (the words cannot be understood meaning that solely rationally Sethe’s deed can never be comprehended, just like schoolteacher cannot understand it) but nevertheless unescapable, told right to the readers’ heart. In addition, it is also important that many events, among them the

infanticide, are described from several points of views: by schoolteacher, by Stamp Paid, by Sethe. Circling around the subject and always returning to the cardinal events can shed more light on them, but there is no ultimate truth, only equally partial perspectives. As a result, the narrative remains fragmentary, reflecting on Morrison's view of history and also her employment of the oral storytelling tradition: the reader needs to fill in the spaces and thus add a new fragment, a new perspective and understanding to the events portrayed.

As for space, one of the features of the house on 124 Bluestone Road is an inheritance from Gothic fiction: its personification. The narrative starts with the proclamation that "124 was spiteful" (3); it was like "[a] person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (29), and it remains "full of strong feelings" (39) until Beloved's exorcism by the community, when it becomes "stone quiet" (270) and no longer "look[s] back" (264), but is still full with "an absence" (270) left behind by the baby ghost and Beloved's ghostly presence. Denver always regards the house "as a person rather than a structure", approaching it as "a child approaching a nervous, idle relative (someone dependent but proud)" (29), and every time Sethe wakes up, she also feels that "the house crowd[s] on her" (39).

Based on Freud's discussion on the uncanny, Azzam argues that in Gothic fiction, since the "house and home are constituted by the repression of

the past and the threatening other; the image of the comforting sphere of home is just a screen for the uncanniness that lurks within it” (22). Therefore, feeling at home entails dread, as the home is associated with “mystery, repression, and the fear of the unknown other” (22). In *Beloved*, this fear and repression is especially meaningful: 124 Bluestone Road is paradoxically the exact same place of the traumatic event Sethe wants to repress and forget, but she does not even consider moving away from the primal scene due to her guilt and shame. Also, for Denver the house is at once a space of deadly fear *and* safety: she is afraid to leave, because what made her mother attempt to kill her children came from the outside, thus the dread inside of 124, even with the chance of Sethe again trying to murder her (which possibility always hunts Denver in her dreams) is still safer than whatever can lurk outside of the house.

In addition, in Gothic fiction “houses personify the family, and thus become useful metaphors for the gothic quest for origins, identity, family, and parentage” (Azzam 22), which feature is also present in *Beloved*. What is remarkable in the novel is how the concept of family and the house itself is gendered, which is also a recurring theme in Morrison’s prose. Her matriarchal households (e. g. *Sula*, Pilate’s family in *Song of Solomon* or Baby Suggs’s house in *Beloved*) are all matrilineal, and the house itself is gendered as well in *Beloved*, as it is possessed by a female baby ghost, which is why it is so

unaccommodating to Sethe's sons and Paul D, and why Stamp Paid cannot even knock on the door, let alone enter the house. However, although the ancient female power and wisdom can be the source of life, illustrated by Baby Suggs, holy, or Pilate, who initiates Macon Dead's rehabilitation to the African American community, it can also be—as all kinds of power—dangerous and destructive. After the 'Misery', the isolation of the house leads to a frozen state of being, where Sethe struggles to survive each day fighting against her memories; Baby Suggs contemplates colors, that is, freedom, and waits for her death; and Denver is overwhelmed by loneliness and silence, which locks her in a perpetual state of childhood. In addition, the house can also represent the inner world of a person, which in case of *Beloved* is "the secretive, emotionally unpredictable and dangerous inner world of the shame and trauma victim" (Bouson 150).

Furthermore, connected to how the house is linked with the question of family and identity, another characteristic of space in *Beloved*, again one of the trademark features of the Gothic, is its isolation from society. Already the ironically named Sweet Home, a Kentucky plantation was remote from the community (hence Sethe's complaint that there were no women to teach her how to nurse a baby), and the slaves were forbidden to leave the estate, but 124 Bluestone Road is particularly "on the edge of community, the periphery of

town, the margins of social existence” (Rigney 57) after Sethe’s infanticide. Thus, the home becomes a self-sufficient unit, complete on its own, intentionally keeping away all outsiders: [t]here was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over” (39). However, this victory over the haunting presence is short-lived and leads to the bodily incarnation of the spirit who so far has only haunted the house: one of the possible readings of this episode is that the female ghost is enraged by the invasion from the outside. And, finally, the male has to leave. Even for Sethe, who loves him, what goes on outside the house is of no importance: “here’s all there is and all there needs to be” (183). But, as already noted, on the long run this isolation is destructive, which leads to Denver’s leaving behind the haunted house on Bluestone Road.

In addition, even though for most of the novel 124 Bluestone Road is portrayed as a strongly female space, it is still haunted by slavery as a patriarchal institution: the owner, Mr. Bodwin, is a white male. He is a benevolent man compared to many at his time, but the African Americans looking for his help still need to use his back door and remain hidden in the kitchen at the back of his house (which structure is subverted by Baby Sugg’s remodeling of Bluestone Road), and who possesses a racist Sambo coin holder in his house. Askeland calls Bodwin “the ‘real’ ghost of patriarchal ownership”

(174), who by his appearance haunts Sethe with the memory of schoolteacher and Beloved with the memory of “the pile of people”, a “hill of black people, falling”, above them the men “without skin” (262). However, it should be added as well that precisely Bodwin’s appearance and Sethe’s different reaction to it is what enables the reenactment and reconstruction of the original traumatic event. In addition, as nothing is black-and-white in Morrison’s fiction, Bodwin is portrayed as a vulnerable human being too, afraid of physical decay and weary of the constant struggle against slavery and the atrocities after the victory of the Civil War. He is not only an altruistic, benevolent white man, nor a harmful presence (he is literally saved by Denver and Ella), but his identity is also inevitably linked to slavery, which is one of Morrison’s strongly emphasized points in the novel.

Finally, it is also important to note that the house as the place of the purification is also important. 124 Bluestone Road, where the whole novel begins, is at the same time “the traditional haunted house of the conventional ghost story” and also “a radically possessed and repossessed arena of historic and mythic confrontation” (Schmudde 409). The house is located between the Ohio River marking the division of the land of slavery and free territory and “a stream marking the watery boundary African myth places between the worlds of the living and the dead”, hence it “is a point of intersection for powerful

antithetical forces: North and South, black and white, past and present, this world and the other” (Schmudde 410). This transitory space is of crucial importance for the ritual and also resembles the shamanic performance, where the shaman exists on the border of the two different realms: natural and supernatural, life and death, present and past. As discussed in the following chapters, the place of the ritual as a transitory place is important in *The Guest* as well.

III.4 Claiming One’s Self: The Reclamation of Lost Identity

Just like “our sense of identity” (Faris 25) is disrupted in magical realist texts, which continuously question the given notions and boundaries of a coherent identity, creating various new possibilities, such as the “radical multiplicity” (25) of Salem in *Midnight’s Children*, also in Morrison’s prose selfhood “is always multiple, contradictory, and ambiguous” (Rigney 35), since she “subverts traditional Western notions of identity and wholeness” (36). Naturally, it can be interpreted as a major characteristic of postmodern fiction, where generally authors do not believe in the existence of a coherent self with stable boundaries. However, as Waugh argues, “for those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and

social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of the inner ‘essence’) has been a major aspect of their self-concept” (3) even before it became a concern of postmodern fiction or post-structuralist theories. In addition, French feminist theorists¹⁷ have also undermined the notion of a unitary self, attributing it to a male-centered Western humanism, defining feminine language and identity as by its nature multiple. Furthermore, trauma also necessarily shatters one’s identity explained in the second chapter.

Arguably, in Morrison’s texts all of these considerations are at play. However, particularly in *Beloved*, more than being female or due to a general concern of postmodern on coherent identities, it is the collective trauma of slavery which leads to the fragmentized identities of all the characters. Sethe’s maternal love becomes too excessive when threatened by slavery; Paul D’s concept of his own masculinity crumbles due to his imprisonment and sexual abuse in Georgia and especially after his realization of his status as a slave after learning his monetary value;¹⁸ both Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid struggle for their own identities by symbolically naming themselves, only to be worn out by ‘whitefolks’ in the end. Quite metaphorically, the eponymous character of the

¹⁷ See the works of Luce Irigaray (*This Sex Which Is Not One*), Alice Jardín (*Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*), and Hélène Cixous (*The Laugh of the Medusa*), among others.

¹⁸ “I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was ... no way I’d ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub” (72).

novel herself also lacks a solid identity: as already discussed, she cannot be pinned down to one entity, and even her body disintegrates gradually in the novel, leaving her only “hope[ing] Denver’s arm around her shoulder would keep them from falling apart” (134).

Concentrating on the female identity, first the disruption of motherhood by slavery, Sethe’s infanticide, then the merging of identities in the female triad of Sethe, Denver and Beloved will be discussed, with special emphasis on Denver’s brave step outward, towards the community and through that the formation of her new self. Then, the collective identity of the community and also the effects of slavery on the dominant group’s identity will be briefly described.

Due to the restrictions imposed upon the female body by slavery, which regarded African women as “breeders” not “mothers”, even to sell their infant children “like calves from cows” (A. Davis 7) was considered an ethical and ordinary event. In addition, slave women were subjected to an “institutionalized pattern of rape” (A. Davis 23), portrayed in the novel several times, most importantly through Baby Suggs, Ella and Sethe’s mother. Thus, slave women were oftentimes “associated with illicit sexuality, giving rise to the shaming stereotype of the black Jezebel” (Bouson 138). The economic exploitation of the institution of slavery was hence rationalized through constructing an image

of African women as barbaric, animalistic, lacking the compassion of a mother towards their children and being promiscuous. All of these attitudes are portrayed in the novel the most overtly through schoolteacher and his nephews, who literally treat Sethe as a cow, or even worse, as a “goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with their horses” (200). Quite paradoxically and showing the inherent contradictions of slavery, this same Sethe is not “too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner” (200) nor to prepare schoolteacher’s ink, which he uses to write down the animalistic traits of his slaves, driving Sixo crazy with his constant questions and shaming Sethe so deeply she still cannot forget the time she eavesdropped on schoolteacher, repeating it as one of the main arguments for her deed: “no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no” (251). Quite tellingly, it is also the last traumatic memory that resurfaces in the novel, the most shameful one for Sethe to bear.

As a result, in such a system slaves are deprived of their identities. Baby Suggs is aware of this fact, even at Sweet Home: “the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home” (140). She could not have an identity, because she was deprived of the roles of mother, lover and child (naturally alienated), and she did not know anything about her self: whether she was “pretty”, a “good friend”, a “loving mother”, a “faithful

wife” (140); whether her mother would have liked her. Thus, in such a system Sethe’s love towards her children and her strong pride in her motherhood is dangerous and subversive at the same time. When she recalls how she has been cruelly beaten with a cowhide, she only insists on the fact that the nephews “took [her] milk” (17), and the strongest source of strength she expresses during her escape was to get her milk to her daughter. Naturally, this love grows even deeper with freedom, with the twenty-eight days (a menstrual cycle) “of healing, ease and real-talk” (95) where she is finally free to love whomever she pleases: “maybe I couldn’t love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn’t mine to love. But when I got here ... there wasn’t nobody in the world I couldn’t love if I wanted to”; as Sethe confesses to Paul D, who also understands that “to get to a place where you could love anything ..., *that* was freedom” (162). At least, Sethe is free to love until the moment the four apocalyptic horsemen, among them schoolteacher, arrive to remind her that she is not a real human being after all and to take her back into shame and degradation.

At the beginning of the novel, while talking about the baby ghost’s power, Sethe remarks that she is “[n]o more powerful than the way I loved her” (4), which is true; it is precisely this extremely powerful motherly love which forces Sethe to kill her daughter. This feeling itself entails a paradox (a love strong enough to kill the love object), which is understood in the context of

slavery in the novel. It is important to note though that the other characters who commit infanticide all do it for exactly the opposite reason (Sethe's mother and Ella): they feel that the newborn babies do not belong to them, but are the results of the oppression and degradation of their bodies. However, Sethe has the illusory freedom of choice (illusory because she still has to choose one man, and one from Sweet Home at that), and a similarly deceptive sense of freedom at Sweet Home, which shatters with Mr. Garner's sudden death. Until then, Sethe believes she has a right to love her children, just like any other mother would—also, there are no examples at Sweet Home that would suggest otherwise—, which results in the excess of her maternal love compared to other women slaves, who had to learn early on that becoming attached to one's children is clearly unwise. Slavery necessarily destroys mother-daughter relationships: when one's identity is not their own, but belongs to their *owners*, and one's child can be taken away at any moment, family relationships become distorted as well. Still, Sethe is first deceived by the dangerous almost-freedom of Sweet Home; then schoolteacher's words about her animal characteristics shame her to such a degree that she goes to the extent of claiming her children as her own, which deed is condemned by the community as a result of her needlessly exaggerated pride. It is important to understand, though, that excessive pride can be caused by excessive shame. As Bousoon argues, the

“racist discourse of schoolteacher engenders feelings of self-contempt in Sethe, who feels dirtied” (141) and deeply shamed “when she is objectified as the sexualized breeder woman”, to which she reacts by identifying “herself primarily as a mother, taking deep pride in her fiercely protective mother love” (142). After all, it is the only thing she *can* take pride in, her successful escape and giving birth on the run being the only achievement she can be really proud of; her only conscious choice, the only thing she actively did for herself and for those she loved, and did it alone, without the help of Halle or other Sweet Home men.

In addition, the absence of Sethe’s own mother also contributes to her obsession with motherhood. In her monologue, she remembers her mother as always smiling because she “had the bit so many times”, causing Sethe “never [seeing] her own smile” (203). She neither knows her mother’s name nor her real smile, but she knows, at least she wants to believe that she was not trying to run away when she was caught, because “nobody’s ma’am would run off and leave her daughter, would she” (203). This lack of motherhood, a recurring theme in Morrison’s prose (especially in *A Mercy* and *God Save the Child*) is never without consequences: it causes Sethe to love her own children too much, regarding them as parts of herself. (This longing is reciprocated by Beloved, who craves her mother’s attention and love as well, culminating in the three

dialogues of Sethe, Denver and Beloved, all expressing possession of each other.) Thus, ultimately Sethe's individual trauma (the lack of motherly love and seeing her own mother hanged), followed by the realization that slaves are considered to be animals by schoolteacher and other whites, causes the excessiveness of her own maternal love and pride, which in turn results in the infanticide.

As Rigney argues, mother/daughter relationships in Morrison's prose lack the "Lacanian mirror (and the separation from the mother that mirror represents)", showing the mother and her children in "the preoedipal relationship", which is portrayed as a "sometimes destructive yet also potentially positive arrangement" (46). Whether the shattering and merging identities can be positive or not could be refuted. After all, Hagar also dies in *Song of Solomon*, and the merge of the identities of Sethe, Denver and Beloved disintegrates all of them. First, it is Denver who realizes, upon the disappearance of Beloved in the shed, that "she has no self. ... She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples to ... halt the melting for a while. ... She doesn't move to open the door because there is no world out there" (123). Then, it is Beloved's turn, who dreams about either "exploding" or "being swallowed" (133). At last, Sethe starts to die, exhausted, literally eaten up by her daughter: "[s]he sat in the chair licking her

lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it”, while Sethe, due to her guilt, “yielded it up without a murmur” (250). In the end it is Denver, who is also traumatized by the aftereffects of slavery and her mother’s attempt to murder her, who first recognizes the need to forge an independent identity, not based on her sister or the absence of her father.

Denver is locked into a perpetual childhood by her solitary life, ostracized by the community and confined to a haunted house, where she cannot socialize with other children from her age nor can take part in the life of the community, which is the source of learning how to be an adult in all of Morrison’s prose. She is at once terribly afraid from the outside and the inside of the house: she understands that the thing which makes her mother kill her children “comes from outside this house, outside the yard”, thus she “never leave[s]” and “watch[es] over the yard, so it can’t happen again and [her] mother won’t have to kill [her] too” (205). On the other hand, there is danger lurking around inside as well: Sethe still cuts Denver’s “head off every night” in Denver’s dreams, “her pretty eyes looking at” Denver as if she “was a stranger” (206). Denver is so afraid of her mother that she spends “all [her] outside self loving” (207), which already indicates the fragmentation of her self. It is first through telling her favorite story to Beloved, that is, the story of her

birth, that “Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it”, a story about a “nineteen-year-old slave girl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away”; a girl who must have been “tired”, “scared” and “lost”, followed by “dogs”, “guns” and “mossy teeth” (77-8). So far Denver has never tried to imagine how her mother must have felt, but because of *Beloved*, she finally starts to understand the terror of her flight, which is the first step of the long way to understand her mother’s motivation for the infanticide. Thus, similarly to Sethe, she needed *Beloved* to be able to re-establish family bonds and lineage, without which there is no identity in Morrison’s works.

In addition, *Beloved* also turns to Denver with an interest that is new to her, who has always been under scrutiny before: “[i]t was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other. Having her hair examined as a part of her self, ... her lips, nose, chin caressed as they might be if she were a moss rose a gardener paused to admire” (118). This friendly or at least indifferent, indiscriminate interest from another person is necessary for someone in order to forge their own identity: under *Beloved*’s gaze, Denver “float[s] near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there [is]” (119). What *Beloved* is able to give Denver—her company, her gaze, her interest

in her stories and her own self—can at least partly compensate for the lack of the community’s bond, which makes Denver cling to her sister from the beginning. Thus, Denver is intent on giving the love her sister needs, who “played with [her] and always came to be with [her] whenever” (209) she was needed by Denver; hence she also claims Beloved as hers. However, when the merging and melting of their identities reach a dangerous stage, it is Denver “who ha[s] to step off the edge of the world and die, because if she didn’t, they all would” (240). But before she arrives at this conclusion, she, along with Beloved, also listens to her mother’s unrelenting explanations on her infanticide, and instead of Beloved, she is one who is capable of forgiving her mother.

Quite significantly, it is Baby Suggs, holy, who gives Denver the final push to leave the yard. Her grandmother’s ghost appears, laughing, “clear as anything”, and tells Denver:

“You mean I never told you anything about Carolina? About your daddy? You don’t remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother’s feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can’t walk down the steps? My Jesus my.”

But you said there was no defense.

“There ain’t.”

Then what do I do?

“Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.” (244)

Knowing cannot protect Denver, still, it is “the only way to integrity” (Rushdy 51). The historical knowledge of the larger context, that is, the story of her parents, grandparents, Sweet Home, Carolina, and ultimately slavery is what Denver needs to acknowledge, address and know in order to have a self at all. Leaving the house is the first step, and soon after that she is first “initiated into maturity and then understanding” (Rushdy 51) by reconnecting with the community and by asking for help, which ultimately leads to the exorcism of Beloved. Denver, for whom “having a self to look out for and preserve” is “a new thought” (252) becomes a reborn person by the end of the novel, signifying hope: with the help of Ella, she is the one who prevents her mother from attacking Mr. Bodwin; she does not avert her gaze anymore when meeting people; greets Paul D with a smile and takes care of her mother without any complaint. She is accepted by the community and she accepts her place in it, along with the past of her mother and her own, which she is able to regard in the larger context of slavery.

Besides individual identity, collective identity is also fractured due to the trauma of racial discrimination. Although in Morrison's novels the bonds of the African American community is always of crucial importance, and those are outside of it either have to reintegrate themselves into the community or they are destined to fall (an example of the former case could be Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, the latter Pecola in the *Bluest Eye*), the community itself is not without its faults either. Perhaps it is shown the most clearly in *Beloved* (and the *Bluest Eye*), where the community, partly by relying on the racist discourse they have heard all their lives, refuse to help Sethe and her family when schoolteacher comes for them, although they all recognize "[t]he righteous Look" which announces the "faggot, the whip, the fist, the lie" (157). Their behavior is caused by envy, mixed with the feeling of unfairness caused by the privileged position of Baby Suggs and triggered by the feast, which was "[t]oo much", especially that "she and hers" were "always the center of things", and Baby Suggs being just too perfect, too lucky: "[g]iving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone" (137). Her "reckless generosity" made the community "furious", who said among them that "[l]oaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale",

nor had been “lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had” (137). Baby Suggs “offended” the members of the community by giving too much, “by excess” and she could smell the scent of their disapproval, which, however, hid another smell of something “[d]ark and coming” (138). Thus, the resentment felt by the community in fact caused the disaster in Baby’s garden, after which she gave up and died; even at her death, she, “who devoted her free life to harmony”, was only surrounded by “a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite” (171).

Considering this episode, the community is not portrayed by the author in a favorable light. When a member has a lot more than the others, and gives too much, especially too much real emotion they lack, they feel inferior, which triggers the racist discourse rooted in the master-slave dynamics. Therefore, they suddenly call Baby Suggs an ex-slave, no better (or rather worse, not having suffered as much) than them, who does not deserve this much happiness. Being oppressed throughout their lives, treated like animals, they forgot how to love (e. g. Ella), and if one of them is capable of real feelings, they cannot but hurt her. As Patterson defines slavery “on the level of personal relation”, “slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons” (13), which results in their ambiguous relationship to love, or rather, claiming another person as a father/mother/child/lover and a strong

aversion to pride they believe Sethe displays. Morrison portrays how the African American community was in general fractured and shattered by slavery, and how they also needed an exorcism before they could function as a real community of freed people; before they could claim themselves.¹⁹ Despite Baby Suggs' efforts at the Clearing, they were still not ready to accept someone with "outrageous claims" (171), that is, the claim over someone's life as belonging to her; which, ironically, is exactly what the masters did (and the verb 'claim' is repeatedly used in connection with schoolteacher as well).

On the other hand, Morrison is not only interested in the collective identity of the African Americans, but also in "what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (Morrison, *Playing* 12). This question is expressed the most overtly by Stamp Paid in the novel:

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. ... The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human ..., the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. (..)

¹⁹ "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that free self was another" (95), as Sethe realizes.

It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread ... until it invaded the whites who had made it. ... Changed and altered them. ... The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (198-9)

In the end, how white Americans perceive African Americans in the novel inevitably change their own identities, too. On the one hand, they can gain confidence, self-esteem and the stable feeling of superiority as a result of comparing themselves to their barbaric, animal-like slaves. While the slaves are degraded and humiliated, the master can develop an excessive “sense of honor and pride” directly rooted in “the degradation of his slave” (Patterson 95). Due to the fact that slaves are treated and kept under control by severely dehumanizing methods, like the bit, chains, the iron collar, whips, cowhide, lynching, institutionalized rape, branding, murder, countless forms of public humiliation and all the rest, all the slave owners feel far more powerful than any Africans. Therefore, while all Africans live in shame, the masters can regard themselves as proud and honorable people, deserving their upper position in the society.

On the other hand, the humanity the slaves exhibit again has two results. Firstly, naturally it makes the slave owners question whether the racial gap is

really so enormous, and whether the difference is even there at all. Also, the cruelty they perform has an impact on their identities as well, making them more inhumane than they used to be before institutionalized slavery. Secondly, it makes the slaves, too, desperate to display their humanity, which is for them something unquestionable. However, by trying to prove their humanity, they also naturally question it in the process (just like Paul D questioning his manhood). Ultimately, this hopeless but shameful trial also shatters and shames their own identities, and freedom itself is not enough to reverse this process. Therefore, both the African American individual and the community is in separate need of an exorcism, which Baby Suggs attempts to perform. She inevitably fails, but a final exorcism is initiated by Beloved (and Denver's ask for help) at the end of the novel.

III.5 The Novel as an Exorcism

Besides the aforementioned elements of the plot—the rituals of Baby Suggs, holy, and the final ritual to dispel the ghost—the construction of the narrative also emphasizes the reading of the novel as an exorcism. The fragmented narrative, and particularly when the three women—Sethe, Denver, and Beloved—have their own monologues, which overlap and merge in the end,

imitate the dynamics of rituals. As for the plot, Baby Suggs, a kind of spiritual leader for both Sethe and the whole community, who even after her death is remembered constantly by them and still gives a moral guidance, after becoming free and first realizing her heartbeat and through that her ownership of her body, creates a ritual for other former slaves in order to collectively seek reconciliation with their respective pasts. These rituals manifest a “spiritual process of healing that combines African and Christian religious elements” (Krumholz 397), reintegrating ex-slaves to the tradition they were deprived of. Then, the last instant when ritual is used is the exorcism of Beloved. First Baby Suggs’ preaching at the Clearing, then the final scene and the ending of the novel will be discussed.

Baby Suggs is portrayed as a wise old woman, a kind of medium, full of ancient wisdom; a familiar character in Morrison’s prose (the most similar being Pilate in *Song of Solomon*). After her heart “start[s] beating the minute she crosse[s] the Ohio River” (147), she realizes she has a body she could not possess or claim before, and, most importantly, she has a heart and feelings she had to repress in order to survive so far. Thus, she decides to use this big heart of hers to help all her fellow ex-slaves to reclaim themselves and aid their reconciliation with their past.

The place of the ritual, called Clearing, naturally invokes the images of healing, purification and rebirth. The ritual performed there initiates bringing up and sharing the unconscious traumatic memories in order to negotiate and transcend their control over the slaves' own body and mind, and help them living a life with a future in it instead of being locked in a constant past. Baby Suggs' preaching is not limited by the definitions of formal religion, although it uses elements of a Christian sermon. Rather, it stems from the imagination of Baby Suggs, and her knowledge about the suffering of the slaves and what they need in order to face and reconcile with their past before they can truly live the life of a free man or woman. Thus, first she asks them to cry, laugh and dance, liberating their repressed emotions, then she preaches, "offer[ing] up to them her great big heart":

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more.

She did not tell them they were blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.

She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they imagined. That if they could not see it, they could not have it.

(88)

Although she is clearly a Christ figure, what Baby Suggs preaches is indeed very different from how religion is and especially was understood at that time, when it was also used to justify the oppression of the slaves, while soothing them with the promise of the afterlife in heaven if they behaved well. Baby does not believe in absolute good or evil, which comes from the African cosmology; instead she believes in a situational ethics: “[e]verything depends on knowing how much” and “[g]ood is knowing when to stop” (87). The sin of the ‘whitepeople’ is that they do not know when to stop and cause too much suffering, which simply destroys the life and individuality of the slaves. Therefore, they need to learn how to love themselves: how to love their flesh, their eyes, their skin, hands, etc. Here, Baby Suggs produces a counternarrative to how the body of the slave was represented and used: “they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! ... Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ‘cause they don’t love that either” (88). By commanding the ex-slaves to love all their body parts and use them for giving and receiving love and care, Baby Suggs successfully defies how the slave body is only mutilated, castrated and/or obliterated in the master’s discourse. But the most important thing is to “love [the] heart”, that is, free their emotions, because “this is the prize” (89) they get after being freed. This also goes against

the master narrative, according to which slaves were incapable of real feelings and human bonds, which justified tearing the children away from the mother or breaking up ‘married’ couples.

Baby’s powerful words and presence indeed help the ex-slaves in facing their traumatic past, but it is still not enough to forge a community consisting of independent people. Many are still too traumatized to love, thus they do not understand Sethe’s claim over her children. As a result of their envy, they do not help, hence collectively they also take part in the intended recapture of Sethe and her family. Due to that, Baby Suggs believes she lied, and her “heartstrings” are finally broken: “[t]here was no grace—imaginary or real” (89), because “her powerful Call ... had been mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard” (177). She is worn out and dies believing that ultimately, white people are to blame; her last advice to Sethe is to “lay ... down ... [s]word and shield” (86), that is, to give up a hopeless fight. It is important to note though that it is not Morrison’s final word in the narrative regarding ‘whitefolks’, as there is at least one white character with the power to heal, Amy Denver, whose name, quite significantly, Denver also inherits.

Baby Suggs’ ritual inevitably fails, because the African American community of Cincinnati is still not ready to be freed. However, the despair she dies with is not how the novel ends. The members of the community are indeed

“caught in a cycle of self-denial, a suffocating repression of fundamental bodily needs and wants” (Lawrence 232). Therefore, their knowledge of their selves is lacking, and the fabric of the community remains too easy to tear. This deep rejection of the body and also the memories and emotions needs a haunting and an exorcism to be changed, which takes place right at the end of the text.

Thus, the novel culminates “in a ritualistic sacrifice of Beloved, a ceremony that frees the community from this pervasive haunting” (Lawrence 231), the haunting of slavery and also the sense of guilt they all feel after Sethe’s deed. Beloved’s presence, who appears here as a scapegoat of past evils, angers all the women in Cincinnati, especially Ella, in whose anger there is “something personal”: she also killed her child before, and “the idea of past errors taking possession of the present” (256) infuriates her. Freed life is hard enough already as it is, every day “a test and a trial”, and “[n]othing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem” (256). Thus, the dead girl coming back to torture her mother and take revenge is intolerable, and the women, who all have feelings of guilt, can finally sympathize with Sethe’s situation. They feel Sethe has suffered enough, and now that finally the family’s unbearable pride is broken by Denver’s plead for help, they believe it is their duty to free Sethe from her haunting past. It is also meaningful that Ella leads the women, as she was the one who rejected her

friend after the infanticide, too; now she is ready to reinstitute her as part of their community.

The exorcism itself starts with Ella's holler, who imagines "that pup coming back to whip her" (259) and instantly reacts to that image with a sound. Significantly, she finds the connection between herself and Sethe, hence the exorcism becomes her exorcism as well, and that of the whole community. Hearing her, the others also stop praying, and go "back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (259). To express their emotions, their memories, and their desire, the community needs "a deeper level of language, a more primitive source of cultural experience that creates communal bonds" (Lawrence 240), a time before the Bible ("In the beginning was the Word"). So, instead of a prayer, the women of Cincinnati need to go back to the beginning of their collective memory that entails sounds, not words. This original sound precedes words and is more powerful than them; the words which, as discussed previously, belong to the master narrative, to the oppressing whites, to schoolteacher and those who believe they have the power to define their slaves' identities. This primal sound revitalizes Sethe, too, and takes her back to the only happy days of her past, just as the women all remembered their happy days together when they came to 124 Bluestone Road:

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

It is a purification ritual for Sethe, the scene of her symbolic death and rebirth, and it is powerful enough to break Beloved's hold on her. It brings her back to her brief period of freedom and peace—the twenty-eight days between her arrival to Baby Suggs and the arrival of schoolteacher—and this return of the memory of the Clearing is a “sign of both personal and community redemption” (Bowers 225). The women can finally learn how to love themselves and refuse the “back of words”, that is, the words used to define them as animalistic, barbaric, irrational beings only good as breeding stocks and slaves. Also, their voice has a power to create (Sethe is born again), which leads to her different reaction to the approach of danger.

It is also significant that Beloved takes the form of the beautiful African ancestor, the mother, but also of the devil-child:

The devil-child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling. (261)

She is portrayed as the revengeful spirit of the African ancestor, and the scene indicates “how a culture may find it necessary in a moment of crisis to exorcise its own demons in order to reaffirm its identity” (Lawrence 232). Beloved is the demon of their own culture, rooted in African American belief system and born out of their own misery, hence her resemblance to an ancestor spirit in this final exorcism scene. She is at once proud, smart and strong, but at the same time “evokes the shaming stereotypes of the black women as the primitive and demonic Other” (Bouson 160), as she is pregnant and has “fish for hair” (267). Also, her escape, running through the woods pregnant, recalls the escape of Sethe from Sweet Home.

Again, as already discussed, Morrison remains deliberately ambiguous: Beloved's identity defies categorization, and she remains, till the very end, the revengeful ghost and at once the innocent victim who is left alone again: "Sethe is running away from her, ... and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. ... Alone. Again. ... A hill of black people, falling. And above them all ... with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her" (262). Beloved, too, has to relive again both the Middle Passage, the pile of dead people and the white master coming for her to punish and hurt her, hence she flees. The fact that what ultimately chases Beloved away is not the voice of the women but the appearance of the white man makes the scene somewhat ambiguous, and although Bodwin is not there to hurt anyone, still it seems that the shadow of slavery is, after all, not that easy to completely dispose of, and the white man is still powerful and threatening. Nevertheless, Beloved's exorcism induces the rebirth of Sethe, who, in a reenactment of the primal scene, this time attacks not the defenseless children but the attacker, that is, the white master. This working through of the primal scene—remembering and repeating it—resembles the psychoanalytic process of dealing with trauma. On the other hand, the community also does not just passively watch the incident, but actively participate and help; Denver and Ella, together with the other women, save both Bodwin and Sethe from any harm. Therefore, both

“Sethe is able to preserve the community, and the community, in turn, is also able to protect one of its own” (Henderson 100).

However, whether the exorcism was successful on the individual level, that is, for the protagonist of the novel, remains a question. While analyzing the film *Hiroshima mon amour*, directed by Alain Resnais, Caruth comes to a very important discovery on the nature of trauma. By being able to tell one's own story of trauma, one essentially starts to forget it. Also, a freedom from trauma—or overcoming trauma—entails the betrayal of the past through remembering and then, paradoxically, forgetting it. This is illustrated by the end of the novel, where Beloved is (mostly) forgotten by the people who knew or saw her. However, Sethe's case is problematic. She literally put part of her self into her children—her cleanest, most beautiful part—and she does not want to forget her daughter and her deed, because it is such a strong part of her identity. It never occurred to her before that she can be thought of separately from her children, so when Paul D tells her at the end of the novel that “[y]ou your best thing, Sethe. You are”, she can only answer, waiting for clarification: “[m]e? Me?” (273). Whether she understood what he meant or not, we do not know, but the possibility of a future with Paul D depends on her ability to claim herself and reestablish her own identity, fragmented by slavery, separate from her children. The fact that she remembered her past and her mother's past as well, and

became capable of retelling it as a story, means that she successfully created a counternarrative, “an alternate text of black womanhood” (Henderson 95), and regained her self, but whether a life without her children is worth living for her is her choice and hers alone, which Morrison does not want to make.

Considering the text from the point of view of trauma narratives, the central theme of *Beloved* is the necessity to confront one's past in order to reclaim one's identity and live a meaningful life. The main characters all suffer from some kind of trauma until they do not remember and face the past, which also suggests that history is never over, and that “a conscious historical connection is absolutely necessary for the psychological well-being of the individual and community” (Peterson 207). Both Sethe and Paul D remain trapped in their respective pasts as long as they refuse to remember their traumatic experience, which is why “the reappearance of the dead daughter is ultimately a threat to Sethe, whose passive acceptance of this manifestation of her guilt is her attempt to erase not only the act, but the motivation for it” (Rand 23). Furthermore, as Krumholz points out, “the repression of the historical past is as psychologically damaging as the repression of personal trauma” (395), which is a recurring theme in several of Morrison's novels that depict the emotional and psychological scars left by slavery and the still persisting racism.

Therefore, Morrison “enacts an authorial rescue of Margaret Garner”,²⁰ and by that, “she attempts to work towards a cultural cure” (Bouson 137). Exploring the internalized wounds caused by racist oppression “by establishing an affective and cognitive connection with the lost victims of slavery” (Bouson 137) and by aestheticizing their inner lives, Morrison’s aim is to bear witness and remember those “[d]isremembered and unaccounted for” (274), who have no names and thus nobody claims them.

However, the author’s “sense of ambivalence, of wishing to forget and remember at the same time” (Rushdy 39) causes a tension in the novel as well, most overtly portrayed in the last two pages. It is a tension between the need to bury the past, the remembering of which is “unwise” (274) and the need to revive it; the necessity of remembering and forgetting, of remembering in order to forget. In fact, it is similar to the treatment of trauma survivors, who also need to reconstruct the traumatic experience to be able to forget it. However, the ending of the novel is even more ambiguous than that. While it points towards the future, particularly in the character of Denver, “it also points to the haunting, enslaving power of traumatic and humiliated memory” (Bouson 160), and that ultimately there is no complete escape from the past, both on the individual and collective level. “There is a loneliness that can be rocked”, an

²⁰ Margaret Garner was in fact taken back to slavery, and only tried at court for her *real* crime, which was running away.

“inside kind”, but “there is a loneliness that roams”, which is “alive” and which “no rocking can hold ... down”: a haunting presence, which “makes the sound of one’s own feet going seem to come from a far-off place” (274). *Beloved* is precisely such a presence. Although everybody “forgot her like a bad dream” (274), there are traces of her left everywhere: in old photographs, in strange noises, in the feeling of a touch, her footprints which seem to fit everyone’s. Indeed, the ending draws our attention to the fact that such an exorcism, although necessary, can never be complete, and when the community forgets about *Beloved*, “[t]hey do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and come-back” (Derrida 99).

Morrison’s ironic insistence on the last pages that “[i]t was not a story to pass on”, repeated three times, carries this double meaning as well; especially that the last word of the text, after all, is “*Beloved*” (275). Clearly, she chose to write the story, which means it is a story not to be passed *by*, ignored or forgotten. As she confessed writing on *Beloved*:

There’s a lot of danger for me in writing it ... The responsibility that I feel for the woman I’m calling Sethe, and for all of these people; these unburied, or at least uncereemoniously buried, people made literate in art. But the inner tension, the artistic inner tension

those people create in me, the fear of not properly, artistically, burying them, is extraordinary. (Naylor 209)

Clearly, Sethe's is a story that *must* be passed on, and all these people need a proper, artistic burial, which, as discussed in the next chapters, is a motivation behind *The Guest* and *Welcome* as well. Both Morrison and Hwang Sok-yong feel they have a responsibility towards those who died nameless and forgotten, "unaccounted for" (274), and this responsibility entails to remember and aesthetically portray the past. Thus, they both ask the readers to witness and share the traumatic memories of both the individuals and the community; not solely for the sake of remembrance and the past itself, but for the sake of the future.

IV. *The Guest and the Trauma of Violence among Neighbors*

The historical division novel of Hwang Sok-yong published in 2000 has become instantly well-known and incurred great criticism from both North and South Korea. As Jeong Hong-seop explains, it created a new form of the historical novel: while it reconstructed the case of the massacre of innocent civilians in Hwanghae province, Shinch'ŏn²¹ through the testimonies of victims and assaulters, it adopted a fantastic form which made it possible for the dead and the living to participate in a meaningful dialogue with each other. Thus, by adopting the narrative mode of magical realism, the novel “minimalized the sense of distance felt by the living regarding the restoration of the past” (275),²² and due to the first person narratives and its polyphonic structure succeeded in achieving a very realistic and authentic tone by which the readers can directly experience the events of the “collective madness” (Yang Jin-o 77) through the people who were actually involved in it. Also, this direct experience of past and present and the portrayal of the opinions of both sides happens in a “fantastic place freed from time” (Jeong Hong-seop 275), and mixing the dead and the

²¹ All proper nouns are used as they appear in the official English translation of the novel, which mostly follows the McCune-Reischauer romanization system. As for Korean scholars, if a romanized version of their names was included in their publication, then that was used; if not, the Revised Romanization of Korean, as that is the current official system recognized by the Ministry of Culture. The surnames ㅇㅣ and ㄱㅣ were transcribed as Lee and Kim, respectively.

²² All translations from Korean to English were made by me.

living creates the opportunity for an intervention from the present ultimately revealing and interrupting the distortion of the past. Hence, adopting supernatural elements makes it possible to reach the reconciliation sought by the author—at least in the world of fiction.

However, it is important to add that the novel ultimately aims to recover the concealed truth and commands facing the past. Therefore, the magical is not present in order to create a fantastic world and escape reality, but quite the opposite: Hwang “discards realism in order to obtain reality” (Kim Byeong-ik 225). Similarly to Toni Morrison, Hwang does not resort to magical realism to diminish the political message of his work. Rather, his “creative transformation of fantastic realism and traditional plays” (Yang Jin-o 81) is there to induce the dialogue between the dead and the living, reflect critically on historical issues, and attempt to change the status quo.

Hwang also expressed his concern about the possibility of portraying various points of views in the author’s note of the Korean version of the novel. Ultimately, his intention is to “overcome the gap between the perspective of the subject and the excluded other” (Oh Youn-kyung 140) that is, his design is to challenge the differently colored versions of ‘this side’ and ‘that side’ regarding the incident and history in general. In addition, he wanted to utilize oral discourse in the narrative structure, and as Oh Youn-kyung points out, “the

appearance of the dead or their conversation with the living was in fact not an unfamiliar story for us in the past” (144), but instead part of the traditional Korean belief system, just like the ghosts and their haunting were quite natural for African Americans. Therefore, rather than saying Hwang uses fantastic elements in his fiction, it is better to state that he employs Korean tradition and ancient beliefs (particularly shamanism) in order to present several various perspectives in his novel, and through this process he successfully broadens and renews realist fiction—just like other magical realist novels. In addition, the magical induces the conjuration of the ghosts of collective trauma, just like in *Beloved* discussed above.

IV.1 Ghosts of the Victims, Ghosts of the Assaulters

Just as in *Beloved*, the supernatural element in the novel is linked with the appearance of a ghost, or rather ghosts in case of Hwang’s novel. They have very similar functions to that of the eponymous character in *Beloved*: they represent the repressed memories of the survivors as a consequence of a collective traumatic event as well as their guilt of survival; they stand for the exact people unjustly killed in Hwanghae province; through a shamanic ritual, they become facilitators of the mourning process after trauma. Moreover, if

Beloved portrays internalized racism and the effect of slavery on the collective identity of African-Americans, in *The Guest* foreign influence, namely Christianity and Marxism, are shown as threats to the identity of people, who “zealously adopted [them] as facets of ‘enlightenment’” (8).²³ After committing horrible atrocities in the name of these two ‘guests’, the survivors of the massacre all have to bear their experience of collective trauma: as Hwang points out in his introduction, “[t]he scars of our war and the ghosts of the Cold War still mar the Korean peninsula” (9), just like the distant memory of slavery still haunts African-Americans. Hence the trauma shown in both novels can be understood as the basis of collective identity for Koreans and African-Americans, respectively. Also, this trauma is embodied in the presence of the ghosts in both novels. Besides the ghost, there is one more element in the novel which can be linked to the supernatural—the homeless old lady who gives the pouch to Yosŏp—, but she resembles more a figure from a fairy tale who assists the hero on his quest.

Firstly, the ghosts are very clearly linked to (collective) trauma. As the author precisely states in his introduction, his work is “essentially a shamanistic exorcism designed to relieve the agony of those who survived and appease the spirits of those who were sacrificed on the altar of cultural imperialism” (7).

²³ Hwang Sok-yong. *The Guest*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007. Subsequent in-text citations refer to this edition of the novel and will therefore be identified by page number alone.

That is, the novel's aim is twofold: to help the living to continue with their lives after facing the memories of the Korean War, and also to remember the dead in a meaningful way and let them go to the netherworld peacefully. According to Korean tradition, if one was not buried properly, they could be condemned to wander around aimlessly; hence a burial, possibly at one's home, has always been an important rite. In addition, vengeful spirits and angered ghosts had to be appeased by a shamanic ritual so they were able to leave the world of the living. The structure of the novel as a shamanic ritual and the role of the community in the cleansing process will be analyzed at the end of the chapter.

What is important regarding the magical element in the novel is that the ghosts are shown in a very realistic manner and a matter-of-fact tone. As Paik Nak-chung points out, they are quite different from ghosts in general: they do not try to mislead or deceive the living, nor do they try to frighten them or harbor a grudge against them. They do not wear any traces of the way they were killed: they look and speak like ordinary people, and the living also treat them as such (353), thus they are actually quite different from ghosts in Korean folklore. However, what Paik Nak-chung observes about the ghosts and recognizes as not 'ghostlike' in fact fits well how ghosts are usually portrayed in magical realism: oftentimes they do not want to hurt the living nor mislead

them; they either give advice or just simply coexist with the living. Thus, they are more like neighbors of the living than vengeful spirits.

As Lee Bong-il summarizes, from a socio-historical dimension the ghosts in Hwang's novel are simply the "return of the repressed", the ghosts of those who were eliminated in the chaos caused by the Cold War and who could not be exculpated but were rather forgotten (95), which is usually the case regarding the victims of collective trauma. However, forcefully forgetting, that is, repressing these memories and ghosts is inevitably harmful, and the repressed always returns in one way or another: "[t]he ambivalence which has enabled repression through reaction-formation to take place is also the point at which the repressed succeeds in returning. The vanished affect comes back in its transformed shape as social anxiety, moral anxiety and unlimited self-reproaches" (Freud, *Repression* 157).

Confirming the definition of trauma given in the second chapter, in *The Guest* nightmares play a central role in enabling the two protagonists to come face to face with their pasts, that is, to see the ghosts. In America, Ryu Yohan first starts to see them after waking up and not being able to sleep at night, and the whole novel starts with Ryu Yosŏp having a "strangely distinctive dream" (11) of his homeland, after which he repeatedly has nightmares and recollections of the past. His dreams start after visiting his brother, Yohan, who

exhibits typical symptoms of hyperarousal due to his traumatic past, and whose house is “always dark” (13), even in the summer. On his visit, Yosöp hears for the first time about the ghosts his brother has been seeing since their stay in Seoul. However, the ghosts did not appear in America for a long, long time, only after Yohan’s second wife died and he remained alone. The frequent reappearance of the ghosts most probably signal that Yohan’s death is near, and that he should reconcile with the past in order to die in peace. Yosöp also tells him while praying that “those left behind ... had souls, just as we do. It is we who must repent first” (17), but at this point Yohan still refuses to admit his crime, which is exactly why the ghosts continue to torment him. On the other hand, Yosöp’s dreams are also the result of his visit to his brother. Ultimately, both of these events are linked to Yosöp’s forthcoming visit to their homeland, which makes facing their past an inevitable necessity for the Ryu brothers.

Thus, at first the ghosts appear as the repressed past after Yosöp decides to return to the place of the horrible past events. They appear in dreams and at night, because they are the embodiments of the traumatic events otherwise hidden and unspeakable in the light of the day. Moreover, crossing the border between the living and the dead is easier at night and at the border of sleeping and awakening, which is in itself an in-between state. Therefore, Yohan first sees a group of ghosts while being unable to sleep:

That night, dozing off and on, in that strange place between wakefulness and sleep, I was awakened by the sirens and red blinking emergency lights of a passing ambulance. Clustered around the foot of my bed, I saw them, a group of people looking down on me. ... Anyway, they were all women and they all just stood there. They stood with their back to the window, and because of the darkness I shouldn't have been able to recognize their faces—but somehow I did. I recognized them at once. I caught myself mumbling aloud in spite of myself.

“I speak in the name of the God Jehova! Away with you, Satan!”

(20– 21)

Here, the author also emphasizes that this state of being between “wakefulness and sleep” is a strange place, where the repressed thoughts and memories, that is, the unconscious of a person can resurface easier. The ambulance and its red lights also suggest something connected to blood and death, strengthening the eerie atmosphere. Then Yohan sees all his female victims, and without seeing their faces instantly recognizes them: it is part of the supernatural aspect of the scene, but also suggests that the ghosts are maybe

not really present, but only exist in Yohan's mind; perhaps they are really just the projections of his long-repressed guilt and hidden remorse. In this sense, the ghosts who appear later are clearly different, especially in their last scene, when both Yosöp and Uncle Some can see them at the same time. However, Yohan is not ready to admit his guilt just yet, because he still perceives the 'other side' as evil, led by Satan.

From this state Yohan awakens, but his mattress is "soaked in sweat" (21). He is evidently frustrated, a victim of his own repressed past. While going down to the kitchen to drink (both brothers are frequently tormented by thirst at night, which can be connected to the Greek myth of Tantalus), he also encounters Uncle Sunnam's ghost, but the phantom disappears when Yohan switches on the light. The fact that Yohan is at first "excited and delighted", "[f]orgetting everything for a moment" (28), indicates that before the massacre, he was in fact fond of these people, and normally he would be happy to see them again. He especially seems to admire Sunnam, whom he used to follow as an adolescent boy. It is him who tells Yohan that he is going to die soon, too, and who also tells him for the first time that "[t]here aren't any sides over there—no my-side-against-your-side", and also that there is no "such thing as living or dying", nor "forgiving and repenting" (28). He is the last ghost Yohan

encounters while being alive, and next time he also appears as one of the ghosts and follows his little brother in order to go home at last.

Similarly to Yohan, at first Yosöp can only see ghosts while either dreaming, drinking or traveling. Flights also represent as in-between state, hence it is there that Yosöp becomes possessed by his brother. Later on, as he gets closer and closer to his homeland and the distinction between life and death are becoming increasingly blurred, the ghosts are able to communicate with him directly—but always at night, in the dark, even when the ghosts appear for the last time: Yosöp “had the feeling that someone was waiting in the pitch-black living room. As he came out of the room, he saw a row of milky white phantoms all clustered together” (178). Therefore, as it can be seen from the examples, the ghosts are connected to the unconscious and the repressed memories of the survivors, that is why they appear either at night or in dreams, or when the brothers consume alcohol, which can also alter human consciousness.

The ghosts start to communicate with the brothers because they also want to be heard. Referring back to the dream of the burning child, here the ghosts also demand hearing in order to help them peacefully accept the past and disappear from our world, and also to help the survivors face their own guilt of survival. The aim of the exorcism, and also the aim of the novel, is to listen to

the different and opposing voices, each coming from its own set of dogmas (be it Marxism or Christianity), let the ghosts tell their own stories, and then release them. After the reconciliation of Yosöp and Tanyöl, Yohan's son he had left behind, Yosöp wakes up in the middle of the night, thirsty and unable to sleep, and realizes the light is out. In the "pitch-black" (108) room, "two men suddenly [materialize] out of nowhere": Yohan, who is "wearing his traditional Korean shroud", and Uncle Sunnam, still wearing his party uniform. They claim they have to "clarify a few things" before they can go, and uncle Sunnam says to Yosöp: "now that I've left it all behind, it doesn't really seem that horrible anymore. We do need to talk about it though, to be fair and honest. Besides, you have to finish any unfinished business before you leave if you don't want to get stuck wandering around in this world" (109). Thus, it is clearly stated here that the ghosts demand hearing, and it is from here onwards that the detailed story of the massacre is told in the novel. In addition, the place and time of the appearance of the ghosts is again important. It is night, and also it is emphasized that there is no light: the light bulbs do not work either. Paradoxically, it is this darkness that can create the possibility of seeing the ghosts, which ultimately means crossing the border between two words: the living and the dead. Also, the scene is set in Yosöp's hometown, and it is his first night there. The opportunity of going back there had to be created in order

to be able to meet the ghosts ‘in person’ and hear their stories properly, at the exact place of the events recalled.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the central sequence of the narrative, when most of the event is finally portrayed, is set when Yosöp visits Shinch’ön again and meets his uncle on the Some Farm. Uncle Some is a practicing Christian and a Party member at the same time, thus he is also on the border of two seemingly opposing forces. This fact also makes him important, because he embodies the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of the two foreign ideologies. In addition, he is also frequented by ghosts: “at twilight”, he can see “lines of the dead” (161), but he has never been able to see Yohan before: Yohan clearly needed to get home with the help of Yosöp first in order to be able to show himself. Uncle Some has already understood that the survivors’ role is to listen to the ghosts’ wound and not to pray for them, as Yosöp would suggest: “[y]ou look at them when they appear, and you hear them out when they speak to you”; and he also senses that they must be ready to finally return to the netherworld, believing that the ghosts appear before him and Yosöp “as part of their redemption” (162). He is the one who shares with Yosöp the responsibility of listening to all the ghosts for one final time, before they can leave in peace; the ghosts who looked like “bleached pieces of darkness, slightly less drenched in black”, tell or rather show their memories: “[a]s in a

dream, the scenes were completely out of sequence, impossible to piece together, some of them shown in great detail while others whizzed past” (179). After always appearing in the dark and in dreams, then on the border of dreams and awakening, at last the ghosts tell, or rather show what happened in dreamlike sequences, which is an adept way of showing traumatic events necessarily fragmented by human consciousness, as discussed earlier.

The role of Uncle Some in this scene is of central importance in the novel. By not praying for the ghosts, he emphasizes that all of them, the dead and the survivors, the Christians and the Communists are to blame: there were no innocent bystanders nor solely victims; there was no “soul who wasn’t to blame” (162). Although he does pray every day for the salvation of all, when the ghosts appear, he just listens to them. As Kim Myeong-seok explains, to reach salvation, a different kind of prayer is necessary, one which grants rather than speaks: “instead of raising the voice of the living”, Uncle Some “grants voice to the dead” (223). By doing this, “the meaning of death and the worth of sacrifice can be revived through resurrection and redemption”, which is also the wish of the author concerning the division of his country: to “leave the wound caused by the division behind and reach harmony on the Korean peninsula” (Kim Myeong-seok 223).

Finally, after sharing all the important details regarding the massacre, the ghosts “[fade] back into the darkness”, “relieved of the old hatred and resentment” (225) at last, and those who are left alive have to “start living anew” (225), to cleanse the land by honestly facing the past without the beautifying lies of either side’s false rhetoric. As essentially a work on division, the ghosts in *The Guest* can be also interpreted as “the ghosts of division” itself, and in this sense O Chang-eun compares them to the specters of Derrida: neither alive nor dead; hard to grasp in reality, just like their incomprehensible, transparent bodies are hard to see; they cannot be understood as existing, and still, they can be called the “really existing reality of division” (304). Furthermore, besides the people killed in Hwanghae province and besides being the ghosts of the forced division, which can neither be accepted fully nor denied, they can also be interpreted as “the unfairly killed vengeful spirits who were unable to autonomously embrace and accommodate Western culture, represented in the novel by Marxism and Christianity” (Go In-hwan 202). Hence, they are the victims and scapegoats of the two forced ideologies and harmful foreign influence in general. However, by reconstructing the traumatic events and by telling about them they are finally able to let go of their deep resentment, and they can eventually leave the world of the living.

Similarly to the other ghosts, Ryu Yohan cannot make peace with his past until he insists on his innocence and him being only a “Crusader”, remembering those who he killed as “the beasts of the Apocalypse” (24). Yosöp also has to acknowledge several atrocities he could only guess before; he has to admit that no one was innocent, not even him, and, most importantly, he has to forgive his own brother. In both *Beloved* and *The Guest*, ghosts are the mediums through which mourning for the collective trauma can develop and reconciliation can be attained. Through them, *The Guest* shows how the wounds of the Korean War still exist, and how true reconciliation is impossible until the people on both sides are determined enough to sincerely face their pasts, rather than lying to themselves that “the foreign powers [...] are ultimately to blame for all of this” (85), and all the massacres were “ordered by Harrison the Vampire” (92); because until this reconciliation happens, the ghost cannot rest in peace.

Besides the ghost, another less obvious supernatural element which should be mentioned is the homeless lady Yosöp meets on his way home from Yohan’s deathbed. The importance of the encounter can be understood from the fact that the sequence in which Yosöp hears about his brother’s death starts with a reference to this meeting instead of the death of Yohan: “[t]here days before he set out for the land of his birth, Yosöp had an odd encounter” (24).

Yosöp gets a call from the minister of the church Yohan attended, and after listening to what happened, immediately drives there with his wife. After taking care of everything, he returns home, and the next sequence again starts with: “[o]n his way driving home to Brooklyn, Yosöp had a rather bizarre experience. At some point on his route he turned the usual way, only to realize several blocks down that the street, lined by tall, dark buildings on either side, was completely dead” (30). There is already something supernatural about the scene: its strangeness was emphasized twice already (“odd”, “bizarre”²⁴), and also Yosöp gets lost by following the same route he has always taken. Naturally, it is dark, and the street is deserted and looks “dead”; Yosöp describes it later as an “inexplicably alien place” (31). It is as if he has crossed the boundary between reality and the supernatural. Moreover, the “old hag” (about whom at first Yosöp cannot even decide their gender) possesses some ancient knowledge: she tells Yosöp that his “house is the Kingdom of Heaven”, and that he came from “the house of the dead” (32). She lets Yosöp know the road back to the world of the living, but he has to buy a pouch from her, which he later uses to carry around Yohan’s bone in.

²⁴ The two sentences regarding the encounter in the original text are as follows: “고향으로 가는 여행을 떠나기 사흘 전에 요섭은 좀 기묘한 일을 겪게 되었다” (22); 브루클린의 집으로 돌아오다가 그는 좀 이상한 일을 겪게 되었다” (29). The sentences are almost identical, which strengthens the episode’s similarity to fairy tales.

Thus, the old lady can be seen as a wise old person coming to the hero's aid on his quest, when the hero is lost at the boundary between the lands of the living and the dead. Moreover, the object she gives him will serve as the carrier of Yohan's bone, which again is similar to a magical object in a fairy tale: "[i]t looked like a compass you might read about, the kind one could use on a journey in some fairy tale" (50). Indeed, the bone works as a compass for Yosöp: Yohan is able to accompany him on his journey and can help his little brother to understand and accept what really happened, while Yosöp helps Yohan to finally find peace after the long years of repressed guilt and resentment. Moreover, when Yosöp meets Tanyöl, who could not forgive his father, the reactionary who made his life painfully hard, he shows Tanyöl Yohan's piece of bone which he has carried by his heart. This bone "becomes the transcendent object of historical self-reflection regarding the old, worn-out reality of opposing ideologies" (Lee Bong-il 105) for Tanyöl, and also for Yohan, filled with remorse, as the piece of bone shows the emptiness of the ideology behind the ideological trauma. According to Lee Bong-il, the ghosts have a similar meaning for Yosöp and Uncle Some to what the bone meant for Tanyöl and Yohan: the ghosts show an attempt to revolutionize the past excluded and forgotten due the ideological opposition between North and South" (205): a past which shows that similar people fought on both sides,

“both regarding themselves as crusaders” (Kim Myeong-seok 219), sacred warriors who risked their lives for the greater good.

The ghosts in the novel cannot be clearly defined just from one perspective: they defy categorization, just as their existence or ‘presence’ is already rich with paradoxes (they are living but dead; ghosts are always repetitions, they always *return*; yet they appear for the first time). Firstly, they are the results of the repressed memories of the survivors representing their guilt, or rather, they function as the projections of Yosöp’s and Uncle Some’s inner world, the embodiments of their own reflective consciousness: they are “reflective beings inside them who are more like Yosöp and Uncle Some themselves” (Lee Bong-il 91). Furthermore, they are the embodiments of the collective trauma of the Korean War and the unacceptable reality of the division of the country in general, while they also stand for the specific people killed, sacrificed and then forgotten on the altar of cultural imperialism. In the end, they also become facilitators of the mourning process after trauma. Obviously, the title can be a reference to them as well: while according to Hwang’s note, foreign ideologies are interpreted as guests, the word has multiple references in the novel: Yosöp is a guest to North Korea, and the ghosts visiting him are also guests in a way. According to Oh Youn-kung, the “shared symptom” of these guests is “the implied otherness” (141), which is also already part of the

meaning of the original word guest, but also of ghost. This radical otherness tests the subject: “shakes his self-identity, and ultimately changes him” (142), which is an internal change the author presents as necessary in order to change the political situation on the Korean peninsula.

As Lee Bong-il points out, the ghosts harass Yosŏp because they were not buried properly, and in this sense through Yosŏp’s visit to his homeland a proper burial is finally offered to them (97). Similarly, the novel itself functions as a burial for all the people killed unjustly, possibly creating an opportunity for true reconciliation between the two sides wished for by the author: “I can only hope that this particular exorcism helps us all move a step closer to the true, lasting reconciliation as the new century unfolds” (9). From this perspective, Yosŏp’s visit to his motherland can be interpreted also as a quest in a fairy tale: his mission is to bury his brother properly and appease the resentful spirits Yohan killed. The magical object which helps him on his journey functioning as his compass is the bone of Yohan, and the encounter with the wise old lady is also a familiar scene from fairy tales, when the lost hero is helped by a powerful entity. Due to Yosŏp’s success, Yohan finally arrives “home” and he is “relieved of the old hatred and resentment”; he can see his friends and “can stop wandering through unknown darkness” (225) at last. As Uncle Some points out after the ghosts disappear: “[t]hose who needed to leave have left,

and now the ones who are still alive must start living anew. We must purge this land, cleanse it of all the old filth and grime” (225).

IV.2 The Language of Shamans

Language in *The Guest*, similarly to *Beloved*, utilizes oral discourse, although unfortunately the English translation is unable to convey the dialects spoken by the characters. Also, the reader needs to take part in the shamanic ritual by creating a coherent picture of the events out of the fragments offered by the different characters, just like in *Beloved*, which is not surprising considering that the two authors’ aim is to force the reader into the role of those who witness the traumatic events and testify its truth.

However, one of the differences, which can be related to the overt use of shamanism in the novel, is how the third and first person narrators are constantly mixed from the very beginning in *The Guest*. The author thus becomes similar to a shaman, who at once can be possessed by spirits of the netherworld and can just see things ordinary human beings are incapable of while still retaining his self. In other words, the narrative functions as a shamanic ritual initiated by the author, who either narrates what he sees in the third person, or chooses to let himself be possessed by the different spirits who

want to be heard. (In this sense the author can be interpreted as a shaman, but in fact Yosōp also takes upon himself the role of a shaman, discussed in the last subchapter, and the old lady is also a shamanic figure.) This is supported by the fact that usually more emotionally loaded contents are narrated in the first person, that is, directly by the victims or perpetrators, and often those which are in direct connection with the traumatic event (for instance, most of the eight chapter). It is as if the spirits, who are otherwise just listening to the shaman's voice, would suddenly interrupt and share their thoughts and emotions when they are too overwhelmed, and when they are in demand of being heard.

This narrative technique also stems from the author's self-proclaimed intention to capture the different viewpoints and perspectives of all the characters he chose to portray, both the victims and the perpetrators, and thus reach a new kind of realism. However, it should be noted that Morrison, whose great strength (among others) is also to present several viewpoints and make all her characters equally understandable to the readers, even if their perspectives are completely in opposition to the others' and general moral values (one of the most successful and moving examples being Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*), the two writers' narrative strategies to do so are somewhat different. In Hwang's novels, characters often explain their viewpoint by relating their misery and hence rationalizing their behavior, like Illiang already as a ghost: "I

never hated anyone, not once in my entire life. For a bowl of rice—maybe two bowls on a lucky day—I worked hard, and I kept working hard so that no one would have a reason to complain. And still ... I had to watch as my family was killed right before my eyes” (204-205). This somewhat sentimental excerpt is from the last monologue of Illiang, who remains as a pitiful character: an innocent victim of the class struggle and the division. Still, the readers know that he also hits the father of the Ryu brothers, which weakens his claim to be regarded solely as a victim. On the other hand, Morrison rather chooses to show some highly influential past events in her characters’ life narratives (with the help of greatly evocative and poetic language), which reveal their past experience and make them appear as fragile and hurt human beings, not so different from other characters. By this technique, although the readers cannot absolve the characters of their crimes, they can still feel pity and even sympathy towards them.

Although theoretically Hwang’s intention to capture the different voices as authentically as possible comes across quite successfully in the novel, due to the fact that the characters verbally rationalize their deeds and faithfully narrate their pasts in order to justify their behavior, in the end his strategy proves to be less convincing than Morrison’s method. For instance, in case of Pongsu, a more indirect portrayal of his character is as follows (narrated by Uncle Some):

“[h]e kept touching the gun at his waist, grinning all the while, but I don’t think he even knew he was doing it” (201). This sentence conveys Pongsu’s cruelty and his obsession with his own power effectively, but it is more frequent in the novel to simply state that Pongsu was even crueler than Sangho or Yohan. Instead of showing his characters, Hwang often gives information regarding them and explains them. Alluding back to Benjamin’s article, it seems that Morrison is more of a storyteller, while Hwang is more of a novelist. Finally, the somewhat less convincing narration in *The Guest* is also related to the fact that Hwang does not problematize the unspeakable nature of trauma to such an extent as Morrison: he only shows the traumatic experience as something repressed (in case of both brothers), but not an experience which is impossible to narrate faithfully. Thus, Hwang chose to represent trauma as a problem of repression, not that of dissociation, which inevitably simplifies his text.

In addition, another problem regarding language is the fact that the voice of women victims is conspicuously missing, although some of the living do have their own first person narrations. This absence is quite noticeable, especially because the primal traumatic event for Yosŏp, which is indeed narrated only at the end of the novel (though there are references to it from the very beginning) is precisely the cruel murder of the two teenage girls from the North Korean Army by his brother, Yohan. Furthermore, the female teacher and

her murder is a symbolic deed for Yohan, signaling his final realization of their side's ultimate moral failure and his disappointment with his comrades and, most of all, with himself. Finally, his other female victims only die as a result of revenge, and most importantly, a revenge on his own close friend, while his sisters die due to similar reasons, killed by Sangho. This absence of the female voice is even more surprising considering the fact that traditionally, shamans are mostly female in Korean culture.

A possible explanation is that while women function as only victims in the text, all men exhibit a kind of double consciousness: they are all perpetrators and victims at once; they all feel both self-righteous and guilty. Although one of the clear messages of the novel is that everyone is guilty, dissecting the text it seems that this 'everyone' only includes men: no harm is shown to be done by female characters, and quite tellingly, even the two female soldiers from the North Korean Army are in fact only musicians, and their weapons are musical instruments. Therefore, the voiceless female body can be understood as the extension of the male characters and also as a location of their respective traumas. The death of the innocent girls from the North Korean Army is only interesting as Yosöp's original traumatic event and the origin of his guilt (though not intentionally, he let his brother murder them), and the body of the female teacher, humiliated by Yohan's friends, only signals his despair

over his and his friends' moral decay. The other female victims' bodies are destroyed in order to take revenge on the male relatives, hence their bodies again are not important by themselves, only in relation to the respective male characters. Had the novel incorporated the female voice more successfully, it would have been more intriguing, and although *Beloved* on the other hand focuses mostly on the female voice and female experience, its portrayal of Paul D and even Stamp Paid is powerful enough that the reader does not finish the novel feeling that the voice of one gender is conspicuously absent.

Although the linguistic fracture caused by trauma is not problematized, the relationship between politics and language is interrogated. Similarly to *Beloved*, language and power, that is, political power is closely intertwined in the novel. Due to the nature of Korean language, where there are several layers of politeness embedded in language itself, the reputation of Pak Illang and Uncle Sunnam can be conveyed simply by the form even kids use to address them, while they have to use polite speech forms to those younger than them. Also, Illang is called by his Japanese name, Ichiro, which is even more degrading, and no one even knows his real name until he becomes a party member. Only after his promotion to a party chairman is he to be called Comrade Pak Illang; that is, only after acquiring power can he demand a real name: “[w]ithin six months of the liberation, Ichiro suddenly became ‘Comrade

Pak Illang.’ His attitude has already started changing in the fall of that year, but no one dared quarrel with him about his new manner of speaking” (124). No one dares to express their dissatisfaction because he now possesses power he lacked before the liberation.

So, after being only considered as servants, undeserving being addressed politely by even small children, suddenly Illang and Sunnam could also regard themselves as equal human beings after the Communists had gained political power. Sunnam’s explanation shows this transformation clearly: “Ichiro, the same Ichiro you all thought was a brainless half-wit, the same Ichiro you talked down to ... learned to read and write. He learned to write his own name. ... If that’s not what the liberation was all about, I don’t know what is” (128). Obviously, names are very important in forming one’s identity, and for Illiang to be able to write his own name equals to the fact that finally he can regard himself as a human being deserving respect and humane treatment, just as much as his previous employers. Although Marxism is portrayed in a highly idealistic way in this context, as a political system that gives power and the right to define themselves as equal human beings to the exploited and disempowered, as already mentioned, the same Illiang also hits Yosöp’s father when he is reluctant to participate in the land distribution, and it is known by the readers that several households were treated in a lot more aggressive way,

while Sangho's father was even killed by the 'Reds'. Still, because it is never portrayed in the novel directly, and because overall Sunnam and Illiang are described in a lot more sympathetic way than Yohan and his friends, ultimately they are portrayed as the true victims of the Korean War. Thus, through their characters Hwang successfully portrays that those without power have always been discriminated against, with or without foreign influence, and this discrimination is naturally embedded in language.

In addition, as it is analyzed in the concept of cultural hegemony,²⁵ those with power can influence the mores, values, principles and beliefs of a society. What is more, they can write their own official history, creating a sense of collective identity through language. (Apart from language, for instance historical monuments or museums can be used similarly, which will be discussed in details in the fourth subchapter regarding the museum depicted in the novel.) In the novel, this process is clearly portrayed through the fabrication of history by the North Korean government: just as they fabricate false evidence at the museum, where Yosöp "spotted clumps of synthetic fibers that looked like clots of burned hair" (95), they disregard the fact that the American army only marched across the area, stating that "[i]t is the foreign powers that are

²⁵ See the works of Antonio Gramsci (*The Prison Notebooks*) and for a more detailed analysis on the Ideological State Apparatuses, Louis Althusser's *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* and the essay titled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)". Particularly the religious ISA is at play in *The Guest*.

ultimately to blame for all of this—let’s just leave it at that” (85), although the ending of the sentence also indicates that they are, after all, aware of the truth behind the lie.

Just as the Korean lady in the restaurant in China, who answers when asked about whether the North or the South is better, answers “[i]t’s the big nations that carry the guilt. After all, the ordinary, common folk haven’t committed any crimes” (62), the government want the people to believe that the atrocities were ordered by the imperialist foreign power, the common enemy, against whom the North Korean resistance is phrased as of holy war for freedom, similarly to how the Christians justify their own actions. It is also for this reason that the war is kept alive in collective memory by means of the museum visited by Yosöp, who realizes “that the war [is] not yet over in this place” (93) while listening to the guide’s explanation of the events he directly experienced. This way, through language collective consciousness can be manipulated and controlled.

The museum visit is concluded by listening to the testimonies of a few survivors. As opposed to the testimonies of the characters speaking through the narrator, as part of the shamanic ritual the novel itself is, these testimonies are perceived as “fabrications” by Yosöp. Although the so-called witnesses’ “anger and sorrow gradually [increase] and, as if possessed, their voice [grow] louder”

(99), that is, they are also compared to shamans, they only perform a role without actually living it. Yosöp knows that though “the tragic events ... had probably taken place”, the words conveying them are “light” and “colorless”, because they “had been repeated hundreds, even thousands of times”, so that “they fluttered in the air, distorted and charred like the pages of a burnt book”, while their original message “had long since turned to ash” (99). This is the only instance where Hwang actually problematizes the verbal expression of traumatic events, and this scene indicates that the problem is not how to find the right words to convey it, but rather that if remembrance is not for remembrance’s sake, but for an ideological reason, then it cannot help being distorted.

Ultimately, the language of the novel is quite similar to the language employed in *Beloved* in some aspects (oral discourse, the significance of names, power embedded in language, etc.), and similar concerns arise regarding its faithfulness and appropriateness in conveying different perspectives that oppose an official narrative. On the other hand, the biggest difference is the lack of the female voice, which slightly weakens the author’s claim to include “a wide range of experiences and perspectives” (7). Still, language is depicted as a deceitful medium in both novels, and its role in forging collective identity is also addressed in both works.

IV.3 Stuck in Time, in the Land of Division

Time and space is less complicated in *The Guest* than in the other two novels discussed. On the one hand, it is the “fantastic place freed from time” (Jeong Hong-seop 275) where the dialogue between the living and the dead can develop, and it is this untimeliness which is necessary for the ghosts to appear: “[f]urtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time” (Derrida xx). On the other hand, this fantastic space is portrayed as a place of division even before the birth of the protagonists, which is the reality of the two Korean people first have to acknowledge before they can initiate a change. Whether this division is caused by foreign influence or by inherent human nature is controversial in the narrative, too, but what is clear is that the Ryu brothers are locked in their pasts, long for their home, and it is an inevitable necessity for them to return both spatially and temporarily. However, at the same time they are also unable to do so due to their guilt. First, the brothers’ homeland and the past as the location and time of collective trauma will be discussed, then Korea as a place of division.

As a novel on collective trauma, obviously the past has central importance, and just like in *Beloved*, the major characters are prisoners of their own past memories. Although seemingly both Yohan and Yosŏp have their own

lives in the States, Yosŏp still dreams “invariably about Korea”, while Yohan lives isolated from the outside world in a house darkened all the time. The brothers’ lives in America is in high contrast to their memories of Korea, which is portrayed in a highly idealistic way: the colors are vivid, nature is abundant, and all members of the community help each other regardless of their background until the liberation. Thus, it appears that the brothers’ lives in the States are not as real as it was back home, which is also signaled by the fact that Yohan never calls his legal wife in the States his wife, only refers to her by her name, even though he believes his first wife left in North Korea must have been killed, so theoretically he could have remarried without any legal or moral consequences. Similarly to other trauma narratives, the Ryu brothers are also stuck in the past, and as long as they do not face their guilt, they will not be able to have a future either. The recollections of Yohan as a ghost serve as a perfect example to illustrate this point:

The dead, well, they may have nothing more to say, but those of us who survived can never go back to the way things were. You can’t stay crazy forever, you know. Time passes Even then, though, even if nobody else remembers, it’s still there, deep down in your heart of hearts. It was this land, this land where our mothers buried

our umbilical cords—this very same land that we dyed red with blood, transformed into a place we can never, ever go back to, not even in our dreams. (205)

Going back home is impossible; on the other hand, it is also necessary. The work thus includes the motif of ‘homecoming’, but as opposed to the *Odyssey* or other classic homecoming stories, the obstacles the hero has to face are not incidents occurring *on the way home*, but rather the main obstruction is the past incident which happened *at home*, similarly to *Welcome*. Although those who took part in the massacre “all knew” they “would never return” (225), just as the return of the repressed is inevitable in the end, they also must return to their homes in order to find peace. Furthermore, this is also what makes the novel very vivid and authentic: the brothers indeed end up going back to the exact place and time of their traumatic events and have a direct conversation with the victims involved. This revival of the traumatic past is a characteristic feature of novels concerning trauma, as already discussed in *Beloved*, where the scene of the murder is also repeated when the white man comes for Denver—but this time it leads to different reactions from Sethe. What is different in *The Guest* is that here facing the past happens more directly than in the other novels due to the narrative structure as a shamanic ritual, which enables the living to

surpass the limitations of time and space and have a face-to-face conversation with the dead. Thus, the Ryu brothers can also return home, and while Yohan finds eternal peace after being buried there, Yosöp can continue living his life without the burden and resentments of the past.

The word ‘home’ itself means the place where one can truly be themselves, without any reservations or pretensions, and where one is surrounded by their loved ones and feels at ease. However, this concept is tainted by the memory of the massacre: when Yosöp utters the name of their village, Ch’ansaemgol, for the first time after “some forty years” (15), he understands instantly how his concept of home has changed:

The word started out with the scent of a mountain berry, lingering at the tip of one’s tongue—but then the fragrance suddenly turned into the stench of rotting fish. It was as if a blob of black paint had been dumped on a watercolor filled with tender, pale-green leaves, the darkness slowly seeping outward towards the edges. (15)

The image of home is tainted: on one hand, it is a “place of longing”, but on the other hand it is “stamped on Yosöp’s memory as the space of death” (Lee Bong-il 100). In other words, home has become a corrupted place; a space

of taboo. This duality of the perception of the motherland was caused by the massacre, that is, by collective trauma, and this ambivalent relationship with their homes can be seen as a natural reaction of the survivors. Interestingly, none of the other two novels discussed share this longing, at least not to this extent (in *Welcome* there is also longing for home, but it is more connected to the feeling of belonging somewhere as opposed to being an orphan). In Korean culture, motherland is an emotionally very loaded concept, which is understandable considering their experience of colonization, followed by the division of the country and the Korean War. However, the homeland of the Ryu brothers was already divided even before the massacre, and this duality and division is the most characteristic feature of space in *The Guest*.

Before the Ryu brothers were even born, the seeds of this division were already growing as a result of the inequality even before and also during the Japanese occupation. Paik Nak-chung explains that the core of the problem after the liberation was the question of land reform, which divided the people roughly into two groups: those of the rich landowners and the poor tenant farmers. The “genesis of the madness” (341) that finally led to the massacre is this particular reform, which is illustrated by the fact that when Yohan arrests Illang, he accuses him for “[taking] our land”, and Illang is not immediately killed only because as the one “who tried to enforce the Land Reform”, “[h]e

doesn't deserve such an easy death" (195). When Sunnam visits Yosöp at the theatre in Pyongyang, which is actually the first longest conversation between Yosöp and a ghost, Sunnam explains Yosöp the background of the events, and tells him that Ryu Indök "managed to secure himself quite a bit of land" starting out "as an agent for the Oriental Development Company" (73), which means that basically their family have become rich by cruelly exploiting those poorer than them. As Sunnam points out, all those who attended Church were "pretty loaded", hence they were naturally against the idea of distributing the land, saying that "the very notion of abolishing the landownership system was unpatriotic" (115). Their attitude was actually quite contrary to the ideas of Christianity, which Uncle Some also highlights further on: giving land to the poor and working equally should actually be a Christian's principle. This way, Hwang shows the readers that the problem was not the foreign ideology itself, but rather the people, who used Christianity as an excuse to justify their greed.

From this point of view, the problem seems to be linked to the Japanese imperialism and the colonization of Korea, which is again a foreign influence. In this sense, it is rather ambiguous whether the author attempts to blame forced foreign influence, be it the Japanese occupation, Western religion or Marxism, or wants to show how the people in Korea were responsible for their own deeds. On the one hand, Hwang clearly shows how mistaken the propaganda is that the

Americans are to blame for the incident. On the other hand, without the Japanese colonialization and the forced foreign ideologies the incident may have never happened, and the title of the work also suggest that ultimately, the foreign influence is to blame—although Lee Jae-yeong argues that the title in fact goes against the content of the novel itself (114).

If one turns to historical documents regarding the Japanese annexation, the liberation and the Korean War itself, it is clear that the problematic relationship between Korea and foreign forces is an ongoing theme in the history of modern Korea. First of all, the colonization of the country came a time when most of the world had been divided already, and when there were already emerging “progressive calls ... to dismantle the entire colonial system” (Cumings, *Korean War* xvi). In addition, Korea had a common language, homogenous ethnicity and culture and well-defined national boundaries, hence it exhibited all the important prerequisites for nationhood long before the Japanese colonization. Therefore, obviously the majority of Koreans “never saw imperial rule as anything but illegitimate and humiliating” (xvi), and also the fact that geographically and culturally the two countries were quite similar to each other made the annexation even more provoking and bitter to Koreans. Thus, those who collaborated with the Japanese ruling elite were punished severely especially in the North. On the other hand, in the South they were

needed in the fight against communism, and the US reemployed many of them, so comparatively Japanese collaborators were subjected to a lot less atrocities in the South than in the North.

After the liberation, Korean people could finally rejoice. However, “[t]o release Korea from Japanese monopoly only to lock it in a Soviet-American duopoly was to make a mockery of liberation and an hallucination of the unified republic that seemed to be emerging in August 1945” (Cumings, *Origins* 428). The first year after liberation was the “crucible” (428) which unfortunately ended in the consolidation of the division, making it impossible to create a truly independent and unified country for decades to come. As Cumings summarizes, the goal of the States and the Soviet Union was “remarkably similar” in its essence: “to bolster and support sets of leaders and a social order that would preserve a continuing orientation toward the metropolitan power” (437). Independence and self-determination could have been more or less acceptable, as long as it would not have jeopardized the interests of the big powers: “the Soviets would not stimulate reaction, and the Americans would not stimulate revolution” (437). In addition, neither power would have been “willing to make concessions towards Korean independence and reunification” if such a compromise would reduce their “ability to control

the outcome or prevent domination by the opposing power” (437). This is how Korea become the first victim of the Cold War.

Similarly to the ambiguous possible interpretations of *The Guest*, in the historical records on the Korean War this duality can be recognized at once, too. Although the different readings and analysis of the events and—most importantly—of the origins of the Korean War all mention both the foreign influence and the class division, they differ in which of these two elements are emphasized. Nevertheless, regardless of the point of view one employs while trying to understand the Korean War, they probably all agree in that the division of the country occurred at first because under the tight Japanese control during the Japanese occupation, the country “lacked indigenous political institutions or a population experienced in self-government”, and, to make the matter more complicated, even the “independence forces in exile were deeply divided” (Stueck 4). Thus, politicians in the USA believed that the country needed some time of tutelage before it could resume being a sovereign nation. Therefore, the two occupying forces, the USA and the Soviet Union arrived to Korea with two objectives: “first, to remove the Japanese, and, second, at minimum, to contain the influence of the other” (4). However, the second goal proved to be harder for the United States due to its geographical distance, lack of “tradition of direct military involvement on the Asian mainland” (4), and other urgent matters in

different areas. These factors all led to the reduction of US forces on the peninsula, which speeded the creation of an independent government in the South, the ROK, and the withdrawal of the American forces. Besides this withdrawal, in the Chinese civil war the Communists emerged as victorious, leaving the Southern part of Korea more vulnerable to a future attack by the North.

Still, it is important to emphasize that Koreans were also not just “passive bystanders” in the development which made the peninsula “the first major military conflict of the Cold War” (Stueck 5). There already existed “[d]eep divisions” between Koreans even “prior to the actions of the United States and the Soviet Union in 1945, both among exiles and among those who remained at home” (Stueck 5). These schisms naturally contributed to the unfolding events even prior to the war itself. In addition, neither the North nor the South accepted the idea of the country’s division, and the leaders of the two emerging powers in the North and the South respectively were both reluctant to wait for a peaceful reunification. Instead, they were more resolved in their decision to restore unity at an earlier date than the great foreign powers. Thus, as Stueck summarizes, “the internal divisions and the intense desire for reunification” together “played key roles in the course of events between 1945 and 1950”, and the war ultimately broke out due to “the interaction of these

internal forces with the external ones” (Stueck 5). Therefore, it can be observed that the Korean War itself is very similarly treated in monographs to how Hwang portrays it in his novel: both Koreans and the foreign powers are responsible, and, as Uncle Some tells Yosŏp, no one is innocent.

The geographical, social and historical background of the South Hwanghae province should be also briefly analyzed in order to understand how the massacre could have happened. Located at the foot of the Kuwŏl Mountain, Sinch’ŏn was a relatively wealthy region in the Southern part of Hwanghae province. In addition, Christianity was indeed introduced relatively early, and landowners and middle-class farmers particularly became devoted Christians. After the division, the region remained “one of the most economically wealthy above the 38th parallel” (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 103), and the youth population quite adamantly opposed the suppression of Christianity and land redistribution. Many of them defected to the South, as portrayed by *The Guest*, or remained and fought against the Communists underground. Several anti-Communist youth corps were formed, and after the official establishment of the North Korean government (DRPK) in September 1948, these youth corps moved to Kuwŏl Mountain to form a guerilla unit there. These mostly right-wing youth forces thus fought underground until the Korean War broke out, after which Communist guerilla units were formed as well due to the retreat of

the North Korean army from the region in October 1950. Hence the Kuwŏl Mountain became the place for both Communist and anti-Communist guerilla activity at different times, which makes it an appropriate metaphor for the division of the country and its people. Finally, the so-called Sinch'ŏn Massacre occurred after the US Army and South Korean forces seized the area, which naturally gave the right-wing guerillas the upper hand, and they indeed took their revenge for all the harm their families suffered during the forced land distribution. The two big massacres mentioned in official North Korean sources (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 103) is the mass murder at an air raid shelter on October 18 in 1950, where approximately 900 people were killed, and another one on October 20 at the police station's air raid shelter, in which around 520 civilians, among them several women and children, were mercilessly murdered. Both of these events are depicted in Hwang's novel as well. Ultimately, in the fifty-two days from October 17 to December 1, during the occupation of the region by UN forces, "35,380 lives were reportedly lost" (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 104) in the Sinch'ŏn area.

However, it should be noted as well that there was a reason for the cruelty exhibited by the members of the right-wing youth corps. According to Cho Tong-hwan, a survivor of the massacre who was at that time a member of the anti-Communist guerilla unit, "many right-wing youth, Christians, and anti-

Communists in the Sinch'ŏn area were killed by North Korean authorities" (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War*, 105) before the UN forces arrived and the power relations changed. In fact, by the time the right-wing youth from Kuwŏl Mountain seized the police station in Sinch'ŏn, there were already "seven hundred people" who died "at the hands of the North Korean police and Korean People's Army" (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 105). Then, as the KPA retreated to the north, the anti-Communist guerilla forces held a rebellion in Chaeryŏng and Sinch'ŏn, which was still before the arrival of the UN forces. After that, there were continuous sporadic incidents between the anti-Communist youth and the members of the local Communist establishments. The US forces seized Sinch'ŏn on October 19, and after that officially the area belonged to the Eighth US Army Civil Affairs unit. Nevertheless, neither the US nor the Korean military forces could gain administrative control of the region. Although the US forces had left the area behind by the time the massacre took place, they could very well be responsible for "overlooking the situation already on fire or even encouraging it" (Hong Seung-yong 220). In the end, "the Sinch'ŏn area turned into a vacuum in which neither U.S., Republic of Korea, nor DPRK forces were able to maintain authority" (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 105). Thus, both the security and administration was left without control, hence the right-wing youth corps took control of the civilians still

remaining. As the Korean People's Army and officials in the People's Committee retreated, residents and the remaining officials of the local government unable to flee (like Uncle Sunnam and Illang in the novel) were murdered by the right-wing security units (Han Sunghoon, *Cheonjaeng* 296).

Therefore, the incidents in the region can be easily compared to a scale: after one side's attack, the other side retorts, and so forth. Who started the fighting would be a meaningless question: as portrayed in Hwang's novel, the injustice was already there under the Japanese colonial rule, and clearly even way before that. Definitely there were atrocities and unnecessary cruelty on both sides, which is not denied in the novel either, although due to Hwang's choice of his main characters in *The Guest* there is more brutality portrayed on the side of Christians, which is surprisingly similar to the North Korean official standpoint. Although in third person narratives some atrocities committed by Communists are narrated as well, the majority of the testimonies and all the statements in the first person are about the cruelty displayed by the Christian youth corps. In addition, by contrasting the Communist characters Uncle Sunnam and Pak Illang, who did not commit any serious crimes (or rather it is not described in the narrative) with Yohan and especially his friend Sangho and his friend Pongsu, Hwang clearly sheds a more positive light on the Communist side. Perhaps the novel could have been more challenging if both sides had

been portrayed equally guilty. However, as a writer from the South, Hwang's statement comes across more strongly this way. As Kim Byeong-ik points out, he was the first South Korean writer who wrote about the Korean War without including a South Korean storyline and who concentrated solely on one North Korean region in his narrative. Therefore, Hwang's novel can be called a "subversive narrative" (235) which successfully forces its South Korean readers to reflect on their unilateral point of view concerning the events portrayed.

Overall, the way people killed each other in order to take revenge underlies the nature of the conflict as a civil war. As Han Sunghoon explains in his article on the Sinch'ŏn Museum, the same place Yosŏp visited in the novel and Hwang also visited on his trip to North Korea, these atrocities "cannot be understood as a mere temporary flash of emotional vendetta". Rather, "the war was the explosive result of continued economic and religious conflict between the left and the right" (106) starting from the end of the Japanese colonial rule and rooted in even before that. In this sense, Hwang also chooses to report the events of the Sinch'ŏn massacre as Korean civilians killing one another rather than choosing to portray it as an atrocity committed by the satanic US Army, which is the official version in North Korea.²⁶ On the other hand, in Hwang's narrative it is the people who rise against each other, but in the name of foreign

²⁶ Although it should be noted as well that the North Koreans do not deny that the Korean anti-Communist security units also massacred many people in order to take revenge, and the firearms they used are on display in the museum. Still, the United States is held responsible.

ideologies, which certainly shares some similarities with the North Korean narrative of the events. The only major difference is who is considered to be responsible: the North Korean documents evidently blame the American forces and imperialism, while Hwang's novel ultimately shows that people were responsible for their choices.

The great tragedy of the Korean War as depicted in the novel people is that on both sides were unable to understand each other's point of view to the very end. This blindness and lack of sympathy is evidently not caused by foreign ideologies, only deepened by them. In other words, as Yang Jin-o explains, the opposition between Christians and Communists in the novel is portrayed as an opposition between different social classes (landowners and tenant farmers), and the incident is not led by the foreign powers themselves. Instead, the Sinch'ŏn massacre is "described in the novel as a civil war caused by people belonging to the same race who accepted the foreign guests of Christianity and Communism" (78), hence ultimately the Koreans on both sides are to blame. Also, it is important to acknowledge that Christianity and Communism were not "unwelcomed guests" (173) from the beginning. Rather, as a consequence of the belated development of the Northern provinces compared to the South, the intellectual and material conditions were not met to absorb these foreign ideas in an active way. According to Yang Jin-o, if the

conditions had been better, the foreign ideologies could have contributed to the reformation of “the feudalistic and oppressive tradition and system” (173) of the North. Unfortunately, the civilians were not ready to be able to reconcile the two ideologies as they lacked the “wisdom of peaceful coexistence” (173), only exhibited in the narrative by Uncle Some, which led to the perception of the other side as the hostile other, causing a rupture on Korean national identity.

Finally, it should be added that similarly to *Beloved*, the transitory space of Hwanghae province is of crucial importance for the ritual in *The Guest* as well, which will be discussed in the fifth subchapter in detail. It is a place in the North but very close to the border, and in the narrative it becomes an intersection between powerful opposing forces: North and South, Marxism and Christianity, foreign and domestic, new ideas and tradition, past and present, and due the shamanic ritual, the dead and the living. As a result, besides indeed being a land of division, the narrative space also becomes the land of possibility and, perhaps, of future reconciliation.

IV.4 Identity and Ideology

Individual and collective identity is also closely related to collective trauma in the novel, just like in *Beloved*. As for the major characters, the

massacre in their hometown and the historical and social developments prior to it—the introduction of Western religion, colonialism, liberation, and the land reform—have all had a major impact on their identities. In addition to the effects of the traumatic event itself, the clash between domestic and foreign culture and its different expectations have already caused a crack to the identity of some of the characters and to Korea itself. As Morrison observes in her novel how slavery shattered the formation of separate identities by dismissing African Americans to a cast lower than human, incapable of self-sufficiency and independent decision-making, in Hwang’s novel the identity of Koreans is somewhat similarly problematic. During the colonial rule, citizens were deprived of their right to govern their own country and were subordinated to the Japanese officials, which necessarily had an unfavorable impact on their ability of self-reliance as well. Also, with the hasty acceptance of foreign ideas people had to choose between their own traditions or the customs dictated by foreign ideologies. As Hwang summarizes it in his note, due to the country’s “identity as both a colony and a divided nation, both Christianity and Marxism were unable to achieve natural, spontaneous modernization; instead, they were forced to reach modernity in accordance with conscious human will” (8). Naturally, this forced modernization had a serious impact on the collective identity of Koreans, and strengthened the already existing class division as well. This

chapter first examines Yosöp's character, whose identity is shown the most problematic in the novel, and through him shows how the above mentioned historical and ideological changes influence the characters' individual identities, then analyzes the collective identity of the country. Finally, how the Sinch'ön Museum and official remembrance of the war in general forges collective identity will be examined.

Yosöp is the central character in the novel: he is both a medium through whom Yohan can return to his homeland, and the paragon of the living, who chooses to face his past, mourns his losses and cleanses himself from past resentments through the shamanic ritual, after which he emerges as a new person, ready to start his life anew. From the beginning, his identity is portrayed somewhat problematic as a result of the collective trauma he suffered, which is first indicated by the strange dreams of his homeland and the fact that he still cannot feel at home in the States. A more obvious scene is when he looks at the mirror on the plane to Los Angeles, and after seeing "[t]he tired face of an elderly man float[ing] on the mirror's surface" (38), he feels "like a stranger to himself" (39), and turning back to the mirror, he sees his brother's image instead of his own. Hwang here illustrates that Yosöp's identity is interwoven with that of his brother's. In other words, he becomes possessed by his brother, and he cannot continue living his own life as long as he cannot face Yohan's

deeds and cannot truly forgive him. He also needs to admit that he was a part of the massacre, too, and he is also in a way responsible for the events. As long as he regards himself as an innocent bystander who was not even aware of many of the crimes committed by people he knew against people he was also familiar with, he cannot get rid of his strange dreams and the alienation he feels. Thus, his quest to return to North Korea is twofold: first, he needs to release his brother, and second, he needs to release himself.

The central importance of Yosŏp's character is also emphasized by the fact that the 'guest' meaning smallpox is associated with him: his first clash with the simultaneous but contradictory expectations of tradition and Western thought, that is, Christianity in his case, is also a metaphor for the development of the country itself. His earliest memory described in the novel is his encounter with his great-grandmother, who teaches him the importance of the worship of the ancient spirits by telling Yosŏp that Mount Ami is "[t]he honorable spirit who protects children from catching the Guest", whom you have to "worship well" to avoid getting sick and "live a long, long life" (40). She also tells him that "[p]eople should worship their ancestors properly if they want to be proper human beings" and the cause of the many problems in the country is that "so many have started worshipping someone else's God" (40), which works as a belated warning in the narrative.

On the other hand, facing the local deity Yosöp feels “frightened” and “strange” (40), knowing that he could be punished by his parents for bowing to an icon. Moreover, he is scared by the deity, which indeed looks frightening in order to “scare away the Guest, the barbarian spirit from the faraway lands”. Even though Yosöp bows to it in the end, it is “the kind of bow [he] would give to a Japanese teacher who has a sword at his waist” (41), which indicates that for him, the ancient belief is as unfamiliar, foreign and alien as the Japanese rule or Christianity to his great-grandmother. After the incident, which “stay[s] with [him] for a long time”, Yosöp “can’t shake off the feeling that the heavens will punish [him] for what [he’s] done” (41). This episode is the starting point of his alienation: he has different expectations from his different ancestors, and while Korean culture teaches people to always respect the eldest the most, what his great-grandmother wants from him is completely contradictory to that of his parents’ wishes. Besides still respecting his eldest relative, he is afraid of the smallpox, hence he bows to the deity; but this is not a real act of worship coming from faith, rather just a forced gesture. This incident shows well how deeply the foreign ideologies affected local customs, and how hard it has become to forge a separate identity which reveres tradition and meets the expectations of the new ways of thinking at once. As Yosöp’s great-grandmother explains, “a man needs to understand where he comes from in

order to be truly human, to be blessed”, that is, instead of “Western spirits” (44) people should follow their ancestors’ faith and traditions. Although she blames the foreign ideology for the troubles, in reality it is the fault of the people who have accepted and followed these ideologies blindly, completely turning their backs to how they used to live.

During the war, about Yosöp little is known in the narrative. He hides the two musicians from the Korean People’s Army, but even the fact that he later finds them after their death is, quite tellingly, missing. This hiatus can be explained by his general repression of the events, his overall blindness and his insistence that he was innocent, and also by the fact that the merciless murder of the two innocent girls by his own brother is the deepest scar, the most traumatic experience Yosöp encounters during the massacre. Due to his feigned innocence, while “on the verge of falling asleep” in Los Angeles, the spirit of his brother talks to him for the second time and accuses him of silence: “you knew all along, and you just kept quiet about it, didn’t you?”, which Yohan first tries to deny, then answers: “I only knew what I saw” (50). Furthermore, not by coincidence, before falling asleep Yosöp takes out his brother’s bone for the first time, and it is the part where he recognizes that “the sliver of bone” (49) is just “like a compass you might read about, the kind one could use on a journey in some fairy tale” (50). This remark emphasizes the importance of Yohan’s

words right after the scene. Associated with collective trauma, silence can be regarded as a crime, because precisely this forced silence is what prevents mourning, commemoration and reconciliation, hence Yosöp also needs to break his own silence regarding the events to be able to grow as a person.

Yosöp's identity keeps being questioned and tested in the narrative. After arriving to North Korea and checking in the hotel, he again has a strange feeling "that he and this street [are] not a part of the same reality": he feels "observed, examined from every angle, right, left, above, below, front, and back—all by another version of himself", hearing "the murmurings of his other self ... right beside him" (69). On the one hand, the suspicion of being observed is obviously not just a paranoia, but rather the harsh reality of North Korea. On the other hand, it is important that Yosöp feels examined by himself, and has an impression that another version of his self is watching him. This is clearly caused by his visit to his native land and the breaking of the silence kept for so many decades. His repressed identity of the past demands to be heard, just like the ghosts of Yohan and Sunnam Yosöp keeps seeing.

According to Lee Bong-il, the ghosts pestering him reveal Yosöp's "ideological trauma formed in his childhood": they show "Yosöp's reflective inner consciousness regarding history" and "his historical sense of guilt while being locked in a divided society" (86). Besides the ghosts, his feelings of

alienation in the States and his impression of being observed by himself also have the same narrative function. His ideological trauma goes back to his childhood memory of his great-grandmother quoted above, and is strengthened by his experience during the Korean War. However, the fact that since their defection to the South the brothers have never discussed these topics ultimately leads to their seeing phantoms and their alienation from society. This is how the ghosts, “through exposing Yosöp’s inner world”, also become “the historical debt the society of the North and the South need to settle” (Lee Bong-il 86), of which the first step should be breaking the silence surrounding the collective trauma of the Korean War as a civil war. Ironically, in the narrative the North Korean agents are the ones who express this necessity when they tell Yosöp that they “feel bad” about him “seem[ing] so unwilling to open up”, while their “sole aim is to help [Yosöp] reconcile and form a new relationship with the Motherland [he] left behind” (82). Although the solution should be different from how the North Korean agents envision it, which is to reconcile the two sides through a collective inculcation of American imperialism, indeed this opening up is what ultimately Yosöp needs to do.

Another thing which should be mentioned in connection with Yosöp is his faith. His interpretation of God is certainly different from that of a traditional Protestant’s. After reading about Job to his sister-in-law during their

joint prayer, Yosöp explains that “God is presented with the temptation to make a wager by his enemy” which “shows that God, though he is omniscient and omnipotent, can also possess inner conflict”. According to him, a human being needs to have an absolute faith in God, and can only be “born anew” if “he truly repents before God, the perfect being” (144). People on both sides were tested and failed, unlike Job; but through real faith, repentance and forgiveness, they can be reborn again. Thus, forgiveness is also central in Yosöp’s faith, and indeed “his visit to the North and his reunion with his family” is his way to “ask for forgiveness” (Kim Byeong-ik 231) for his sense of guilt. He already tells to his brother’s son at the end of their first meeting that “[u]nless we find a way to forgive one another, none of us will ever be able to see each other again” (88). Later, during their second meeting, he also tells Tanyöl that the massacre was done by “Satan”, whom he defines as “the black thing that lives in the heart of every man” (106); and as he explains to his sister-in-law, Satan is “a different Godlike being near [God] ... that acts as an enemy to human beings” (144) with whom God makes bets with. Thus, from a Christian perspective Yosöp understands the civil war as a test of faith and a wager made between God and Satan, similar to Job’s trial, which Koreans failed in the end. However, through repentance redemption can be reached, hence Yosöp tells his nephew that he came to North Korea “to cleanse us all of the crimes that were committed by

people like your father and me” (107). His repentance is successful: when waking up at the end of the novel and looking in the mirror, Yosöp finally sees “the face of the most familiar man in his whole world” (232).

The identities of all the other characters are strongly influenced by ideology: Yohan and his fellow Christian friends imagine that they are the soldiers of Christ on a witch-hunt, on a holy quest, while Uncle Sunnam and Illiang gain their identity through identifying with Marxism. Sadly, compared to the Ryu brothers representing the influence of Christianity and Uncle Some representing coexistence, those who are associated with Marxism are portrayed with less depth. The novel could have been more successful if the characters on the Left were also more complex human beings: not hating anybody in their whole lives and not committing any crimes makes Illiang and Sunnam too idealistic, and also the portrayal of the North comes across as slightly distorted this way. Also the atrocities committed by the Communists are “just simply summarized and passed by” (Hong Seung-yong 223), while the ones committed by Yohan and his friends are described very vividly. As a result, the characters on the North cannot help but pale in comparison with the Christian ones, whose emotional depth is explored in the narrative, leaving Illiang and Sunnam quite flat, although certainly very tragic and pitiful. In addition, while *The Guest* certainly calls for introspection and self-reflection, it seems that this imperative

is only addressed to the South: the North Korean characters in the novel do not really commit anything they should reflect on, including Yohan's son, Tanyöl.

In fact, the only one who has a coherent identity in the novel is Uncle Some: he is the one who is not caught by the bitter struggle between the two foreign ways of thinking, but who rather embraces both and through this symbiosis, forges an authentic and independent identity. According to him, the class conflict after liberation was twofold: "from the inside, it was caused by the contradictions of the land reform and the opposing class interests surrounding the distribution of the land, while on the outside by the different ideologies chosen by each class as problem-solving methods". Due to this process, the civilians only "suffered ideological trauma and became divided" (Lee Bong-il 89) instead of solving any real problems. Since the character of Uncle Some "can function as the one who expresses the 'authoritative interpretation' of the work" (Paik Nak-chung 345), it seems well-grounded to say that although the title doubtlessly refers to the foreign ideologies as unwelcomed and overall harmful guests, the massacre and the division is ultimately the responsibility of the people involved directly, and that everybody on both sides is guilty to a certain extent. The identities of individuals were fractured due to several external and internal factors (Japanese occupation, Christianity, Marxism, class division, liberation, the division of the country and

the collective trauma of the Korean War), but it is time to settle the historical debt between North and South and start living a new life with a newly forged identity. And if there is any moral lesson to be learnt from such a tragic historical event as the massacre and the Korean War, it is incorporated in “the enlightenment and understanding of Uncle Some’s character” (Jeong Hong-seop 321).

All the identity crisis experienced by the characters is rooted in the dividedness of Korea as one nation into two countries. As already quoted once, Hwang Sok-yong sees the core of the problem in “Korea’s identity as both a colony and a divided nation” (8). While the effects of colonization are somewhat similar to the effects of slavery discussed regarding *Beloved*, which also necessarily shatters individual identities, the division of the country is an altogether different matter. When the peninsula and with it the Korean nation became divided, it inevitable led to a “bipolar” (Gelezeau et al., 8) Korean identity, which has been strengthened further on by the parallel narratives created on both sides of the border. In the novel only the North Korean official interpretation of the war is portrayed, which has a central role in creating a collective identity for the people remaining in the North.²⁷

²⁷ Naturally, the South has similar policies as well, but since they are not part of the novel, they will not be dealt with.

One of the central scenes of the novel is Yosöp's visit to the Sinch'ön Museum. As Suzy Kim observes in connection with the war museum in Pyongyang, "the function of monuments and museums is to summon the past to serve the present" (82), which is undoubtedly true about the museum in the novel as well. The North Korean narrative of the war is thus presented through its museums as undisputable and unambiguous, where the war and the massacre as well was caused solely by American imperialism. The Korean War was supposedly the first step towards world hegemony, heroically prevented by the North Korean Army and its allies through sheer willpower and determination, and the world was only saved from the Third World War by Kim Il Sung. According to the official North Korean narrative, based on President Roosevelt's suggestion in 1943 for a trusteeship over Korea, "the United States ... long coveted Korea for its geographic location and its ports and rails stretching into Northeast Asia and the Soviet Union, with the potential to reach Europe" (Suzy Kim 86). Therefore, the division of the Korean peninsula was considered to be by them as part of an already conceived plan in order to occupy the Southern part of Korea without a war, while the Russians only occupied the North in August 1945 fighting against the Japanese. Ironically, the United States' narrative of the war is almost the same but inverted: in their

understanding, the war was waged to prevent Soviet expansionism. Thus, in both narratives the certainty that division caused the war is accepted as fact.

Moreover, war memorials are also connected to “the formation of modern states and nationalism”, since they are employed to forge collective identity through “specific commemorative acts, a process through which past experiences are reconstructed for the social context of the present” (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 101). After all, the sense of nationhood originates from common experience and a shared present and past, hence acts of commemoration are powerful building blocks in the formation of collective identity. Also, war museums recreate past heroes and martyrs, thus portraying the wars they sacrificed their lives for as holy and honorable. For instance, through the exhibitions in the Sinch’ŏn Museum by looking at all the “murder weapons”, “photographs of the reservoir” where countless people had been drowned, “[t]he walls ... packed from top to bottom with photographs of dead bodies” (94) and such, visitors are able to identify with the victims and share their agony. Through this process, the museum “produces [a] sense of community”, and also emphasizes “the victims’ martyrdom” (Han Sunghoon, *Ongoing War* 112) very powerfully, while at the same time kindling hostility towards the United States. Indeed, according to Han Sunghoon “the expansion of anti-Americanism as a mass political campaign” (*Ongoing War* 109) started

with the building of the Sinch'ŏn Museum illustrated well in the novel. Thus, one of the aims of Hwang's novel is to oppose the official narratives of the war of the two Koreas since they both prevent real communication between the two countries, establishing their own collective identities in the process of otherizing the other Korea.

The identity of both the characters depicted in the novel and Korea as a nation is heavily influenced by the opposing foreign ideologies in Hwang's work. Due to the Japanese colonization, the identity of Koreans was neither strong nor independent enough to be able to adopt Christianity and Marxism in a mature way, which ultimately resulted in the civilian massacre. Moreover, living with the memory of collective trauma and the survivors' guilt also makes it almost impossible for the characters to forge their own separate identities, except for Uncle Some. The two Koreas also created their own narratives of the war and division, which does not contribute to a peaceful reconciliation either, causing Koreans to suffer from a bipolar identity and alienation as a result of the forcefully silenced and repressed past. As Yosŏp summarizes it after his visit to the Sinch'ŏn Museum: “[w]hat different colors he and his brother Yohan must have used as each of them painted their own picture of home, of the carnage. These people have constructed yet a different version of their own ..., but all stems from the same nightmare, the one we created together” (94),

and his dizziness following the visit is clearly caused by his recognition of the differences in perspective, creating vastly disparate interpretations of the exact same event.

Therefore, one of the messages of the work is that people should disregard the official grand narrative of history and instead try to understand the point of view of the other through an honest conversation. As Kim Jae-young observes, “a very important role the ghosts take on is that through making their voices heard, they subvert the official voice” (327), that is, the official narrative concerning the incident. Also, there is a responsibility to listen to those who suffered rather than ignoring their wounds: collective trauma should never be silenced or repressed, because that only leads to an inherited sense of guilt by the second or third generations—and an inheritance of ghosts. Besides who was responsible for the massacre an important observation of the novel is that the scars caused by the guest are already part of the bodies of the survivors: “[t]he disease is located not in the other, but in our own bodies” (Han Min-ju 64), just like the ghosts called Marxism and Christianity. Even if the forced modernity came from the outside, the other became part of the Koreans’ identity, which they have to acknowledge in order to make peace with the past.

IV.5 Shamanic Ritual as Narrative Structure

As Hwang states in his introduction, the frame of the narrative is the “Chinogwi exorcism of Hwanghae Province”, “consist[ing] of twelve separate rounds” during which “the dead and the living simultaneously cross and recross the boundaries between past and present”, appearing randomly to share “their stories and memories” (7), that is, their testimonies concerning the terrible past events. Due to this narrative structure, “the boundaries between real and unreal, living and dead become meaningless” (Han Min-ju 61), and the text as a whole functions as an exorcism. Through this shamanic ritual to appease the dead spirits the writer also “remembers and mourns history and the people in it” (62).

The ritual as a framework is very apparent in the novel. As Go In-hwan observes, the novel follows the 12 steps of a particular type of exorcism²⁸ that aims to pacify dead spirits, and the chapters’ titles all follow the names of these 12 steps in the same order, sometimes without any change (e. g. chapter 7 is titled *The Birth of a New Life: Who Lives in This World?*, and step 7 is also the birth of a new life; chapter 10 is *Burning the Clothes: Burial*, while step 10 is burning the clothes of the deceased), sometimes with slight changes, to

²⁸진지노귀굿

modernize the words and make them more fit for the plot of the novel. In addition, the last chapter *Farewell Guests*²⁹ is literally a shaman's song.³⁰ Consequently, the reading of the novel as an exorcism of the ghosts of Hwanghae province is emphasized. Interestingly, there are no direct references to shamans and shamanism in *The Guest* related to the ritual the novel itself is, except for the aforementioned last chapter, the titles of the chapters and the author's note. However, shamanism is mentioned once: when the brothers' great-grandmother tells Yosŏp that due to the lack of medicine, "[c]onsulting a shaman was the best" (43) option in the struggle against the guest, that is, smallpox. However, since people were quite poor, many could not afford a "full exorcism" (43). Eventually, this full exorcism is attempted by Hwang Sok-yong in his novel against a more destructive guest: prematurely adopted foreign ideology causing false narratives and forced silence.

Through this structure and due to the ritualistic characteristics of this particular kind of exorcism, "the survivors' and the deceased's separation is experienced again" (Go In-hwan 202), during which the deep resentment they harbor needs to be resolved for the exorcism to be successful. Due to the reconstruction of the massacre and the re-experience of the separation between survivors and the dead, both parties can become pure spirits, and the possibility

²⁹뒤 풀이

³⁰巫歌

of the dialogue between them offers new hopes and opportunities for the other sufferers of the division as well. As the aim of the exorcism is to appease the dead spirits and make reconciliation between them, and also between them and the living possible, the novel also aims to show the possibility of reconciliation between the two sides through a collective commemoration. Moreover, the fact that Hwang uses Korean folk tradition to structure his novel is also meaningful. The massacre was the result of the clashing of two foreign influences, both of which were forced on Koreans and which they were unable to accept independently and thus fuse with their own tradition. This clash is relieved through the employment of one of the oldest Korean traditions still alive, emphasizing the importance of one's and a nation's roots, but also accepting differences. After all, the medium through whom this exorcism is completed is no one else than Yosŏp, a devoted Christian minister.

Besides soothing wrongfully killed dead spirits, the ritual is also necessary for the living subjects, perhaps even more than to the dead. While the North is considered to be an “ideological other” and a “rival” (Oh Youn-kyung 143), which Yosŏp could not have even visited if not for his American passport, in order to visit this corrupted homeland a kind of ritual is necessary. On the way from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, Yosŏp meets the ghost of his brother, and literally sits on him while Yohan is sitting in his seat. Also, as already

mentioned, Yosöp sees Yohan in the mirror on the plane instead of his own face, hence their identities are certainly somehow intertwined. Therefore, it is easy to notice that Yosöp is in a way possessed by his brother, thus his role can be very well compared to that of a shaman. Also, on the plane he is pondering over how he is traveling backwards in time (and also back to the past), thus leaving behind the place and time of present reality and crossing the boundaries between different times and places: between different worlds. From this moment, Yohan becomes part of his brother, that is, he is incorporated by Yosöp, illustrated by the fact that Yosöp hears his voice from inside of his body: “something inside his throat suddenly rose up and passed through his neck to his skull, and suddenly Yohan’s soft voice was with him again” (50), and he leaves Yosöp as a voice, too: “[t]he voice was gradually dying out, turning into other sounds” (58). As Oh Youn-kyung points out, from this moment “the time of the narrative becomes the time of the ghost” (146). In other words, “time is out of joint” (3), as it is quoted by Derrida on the theme of “haunting” (10). In this scene Yosöp lets the other called as a ghost inside his body, which makes it possible for him to travel through time and space and visit his homeland, and also it is through this process of incorporation that he becomes a medium. Later, he is also able to converse with ghosts, and at the end he is able to perform the shamanic ritual as well.

The center of the novel is the eighth chapter titled *Requiem: Judgement*, which is also the peak of the ritual itself. This is the part where all people involved gather and share their testimonies, the living and the dead as well, which is portrayed as an oral discourse quite similar to an ordinary “village gathering” (Paik Nak-chung 353) by Hwang. This part, where all the concealed truths are finally honestly exposed, is written in the first person from multiple perspectives, and what makes this seemingly ordinary, but actually impossible gathering possible is the exorcism itself. Therefore, in this chapter especially the author can be interpreted as a shaman, as it is through his evocation of the spirits that the most crucial part of the ritual can take place. Due to the author’s role as a medium and his successful exorcism, the truth behind the massacre can finally be restored. As a result of his role as a mediator, in this chapter the author does not intervene: “he steps back and instead lets the witnesses, perpetrators and victims tell in their own voice how they have died or stayed alive” (Yang Jin-o 172). As a shaman’s body is “alternatingly possessed by different spirits who can tell their opinions, thoughts, experience” (Oh Youn-kyung 148) and through this process they can resolve their deep resentment and finally go to the netherworld, such is the narrative body of the novel possessed by the different first person narrators. Thus, the ritual as a narrative structure is used as an aesthetic device in order to successfully expose the hidden truth

behind a historical incident officially interpreted as a massacre committed by the American army. In the gaps between the pages of the official history still based on the logic of the Cold War the ghosts appear and talk, “squeezing out the truth from parts of the concealed history” (Yang Jin-o 172).

Still, the fact that the author takes upon the role of a shaman does not mean that Yosöp’s role as a mediator is any less important. After all, he is the one who talks freely with the different ghosts until they all appear together and share their testimonies with Yosöp and Uncle Some. In addition, it is him who helps his relatives left behind in North Korea to come to terms with their inheritance and forgive Yohan, letting go of their bitterness and hatred. At the end, Yosöp also buries the bone of Yohan and burns his clothes, hence symbolically cleansing him of his sins and aiding his journey to the world of the dead. He definitely plays the role of a shaman in the novel (probably this is the reason why he emerges as the main character after all), although Uncle Some and Yohan’s wife are also portrayed as mediators: Uncle Some helps listening to the dead, and Yosöp’s sister-in-law prepares an ancestral ritual for her departed husband. In addition, she is the one who admits that ghosts “live inside you, inside me—they’re everywhere” (149), which is precisely why an exorcism is necessary.

The problem that ghosts live inside the characters mean that rather than the dead, *they* need an exorcism. As already analyzed, Yosöp's identity is shattered and he feels alienated. In connection with this and his need for an exorcism, it is important to note that the novel both starts and ends with Yosöp's dreams. His first dream suggests the foreign disease, that is, the advancing guest, but his second and third dreams are more personal. The second is the music coming from the violin the girls Yosöp aided played, while the third is entirely Yosöp's imagination of his brother after the murder of the two girls. Interestingly, this is a scene Yosöp could not see directly. Also, in this dream Yohan appears in his older form, just like Yosöp saw him last. Moreover, Yohan seems agitated, and the scene ends with his praying figure. However, according to Yohan's recalling of the events he killed the girls calmly and cold-heartedly, and did not pray afterwards. This scene represents Yosöp's sense of guilt, but also his anger towards his brother, whom he has been unable to forgive. This incident was certainly the primal trauma of Yosöp and the ultimate cause of his constant sense of guilt and alienation. However, these feelings cannot help the dead anymore, and the one who "suffers from the sense of guilt and trauma is Yosöp himself" (Oh Youn-kyung 150), just as his sister-in-law suffers from the guilt Yohan left behind.

In this sense, rather than the ghosts calling for someone to listen to them, it is the living, that is, Yosöp himself who summons the dead and talks to them and who needs their help. As Oh Youn-kyung points out, the original shamanic ritual also used the pretext of soothing and comforting the spirits of the dead in order to help the living in releasing their anger, resentment and bitterness, so that finally they can continue living their lives not as walking corpses locked in their painful past, but as individual subjects living in the present and facing the future. Fundamentally, as Lee Jeong-hui explains, the deep structure of the shamanic ritual for cleansing dead spirits³¹ is to cleanse the living from the violence they committed against the dead and from the feelings of guilt and fear, so ultimately the “shamanic ritual is for the living themselves” (289).

In connection with Yosöp’s need for an exorcism, it is valuable to briefly allude to Derrida’s thoughts on the work of mourning. As opposed to Freud, who described a successful mourning as well as an unsuccessful one in *Mourning and Melancholia*, depending on whether the incorporation of the love object, that is, the dead other was possible or not, Derrida argued that mourning, which “always follows a trauma” (97), is impossible but inevitable; a similar paradox than Yohan’s need to go home and the fact that he can never return. According to Derrida, all mourning remains unsuccessful and to a certain extent melancholic, due to the absolute otherness and exteriority of the love object that

³¹썻김긔

cannot be fully incorporated to the subject. From this perspective, Yosöp inevitably attempts to mourn his brother (and for his brother) and inevitably fails, but it is through this failure that he can exist as a subject. Derrida uses the word ‘conjunction’ which has a similar double meaning as exorcism: it means calling, summoning the dead, but also expelling them, which is performed in order to recover the lost relationship with the dead, but also to recover the subject at the same time. The success of the ritual can be seen from Yosöp’s last dream, where he sees his hometown in its original form: people working and singing, mothers calling for the children, animals and nature in a peaceful landscape. Moreover, waking up from the dream, he sees his face as familiar, which signals that both his childhood memory of his hometown and his identity has been recovered. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Yosöp was reborn in the novel between his first dream and his last, so the exorcism or ritual was successful: through his mourning and incorporation of his brother, he became a real subject.

It is important to note that the other as a ghost in the novel is portrayed as inherited: it is not something from the outside, but comes from the inside. As Parkin-Gounelas observes about Gothic fiction, the ghosts coming back to haunt “not just Gothic fiction but all human subjects” are in fact foreign bodies inside the subjects, and the “taboo past of ancestors ... figure in Gothic as this

foreign body which cannot be expelled” (136). In *The Guest* as well the ghosts come from the silenced memories and repressed guilt and remorse of the characters as well as from their mourning, inheriting their sinful past. The appearance of the ghosts disrupts the present order, and through this rupture the chance of liberation from the sins of the previous generation emerges. Due to this chance, it becomes possible to ‘set right’ the time out of joint and leave behind the sense of guilt experienced by all the survivors, which still haunts the next generation as well, even those yet unborn. Ultimately, the guest the characters need to welcome is not something foreign or alien, but the ghosts coming from the inside of their own selves.

The act of Yosŏp, who burns his brother’s clothes and buries his bone can be understood as “mourning for the ghosts of the Cold War, while also mourning for the ideologies that should not be repeated again” (Lee Bong-il 92), and the novel clearly “crosses through ideology, goes beyond the history of division, and is ultimately a demand of its time towards unification” (108). It reveals the necessity of a peaceful coexistence embodied in the character of Uncle Some and also of atonement portrayed in Yosŏp’s character. In other words, as Kim Byeong-ik phrases it, the novel “not only advises in a subtle voice to reveal the truth regarding division, but also to look for a way of atonement and reconciliation” (236). In addition, *The Guest* tries not to take

sides and shows that both the North and the South are essentially the same, and if the problem of the Korean nation is treated from the point of view of either sides, then the voice of the other will be inevitably distorted or silenced, and will be treated only as a hostile other. To prevent this, Hwang evokes the dead on both sides, but mostly from the North, and uses an immigrant Protestant pastor to play the role of a shaman, possessed by the different spirits.

Another important function of the ritual is to reestablish the sense of community ruptured by the original traumatic event. Similarly to *Beloved*, due to the original event the relationships between people belonging to the same community were severed, and until the appearance of the ghosts there was no chance for reconciliation, since every discourse on the massacre (or infanticide) was silenced. However, as a result of Yosöp's visit to the 'other side' and his traveling back in time and space, and more importantly through his role as a shaman an oral discourse concerning the events can finally take place, and spirits from both sides can tell their own stories and share their memories and feelings, leading to a new emerging sense of community. In Yosöp's aforementioned dream the village returns back to its normal existence, and the characters can also get closer to the acceptance that differences in ideology do not mean that their community (or the Korean peninsula) need to be divided: Yosöp's sister-in-law can continue living her life in faith, while at the same

time preparing an ancestral ritual for her husband, and Yohan's abandoned son can also accept and forgive the faith and wrongdoings of his father without compromising his identity as a Communist. Without acceptance and peaceful coexistence, there is no community, and if something unfair and violent happens in the community, the past needs to be recovered and relived, not silenced, in order to forge collective identity. Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, the community Hwang restores in *The Guest* is not just the community of the people from the same village, but through the second generation and through those who left the country and even the peninsula it is the Korean nation itself.

When Seong Min-yeop analyzes *The Guest*, he comes to the conclusion that “instead of the opposition between Marxism and Christianity”, the conflict between “original and foreign” (243) is more central in the novel (metaphorically, the host and the guest), thus the opposition between the two foreign ideologies is in fact of secondary importance in the narrative. Rather, they have a “common feature”: they are both ‘guests’, and while against each other they are “perpetrators and victims at once, they are similarly victims of this same ‘guest’” (244). In this sense, the force which unites the two sides is again a hostility: a hostility against the foreign. If that would indeed be the framework of the novel, its conclusion would not be a lot different from a Cold

War logic. However, while this understanding may correspond to Hwang's ideas expressed in the author's note, the literary text itself should be the basis of any kind of critical analysis. On the one hand, in the narrative there are some ambiguities as well (the insistence that the root of the problem is forgetting the way how people used to live), and Hwang's employment of shamanism also suggests a return to the roots (even Buddhism and Confucianism were foreign influences, thus shamanism is indeed the tradition most rooted in Korean indigenous tradition), the conclusion and Uncle Some's message is clearly different. The important thing is not whether someone accepts foreign ideologies or not, but rather how one uses them to only justify his material needs or indeed follows the ideology, but without forgetting how human relationships are ultimately the most important in a close-knit community. Without accepting different value systems and ways of thinking, and without looking at the other as 'one of us', there will be no unification of the two Koreas.

V. *Welcome* and the Trauma of Abandonment

Krisztián Grecsó, born in 1976, is currently enjoying both great popularity and high critical acclaim in Hungary. After two collections of poetry, he published his first collection of short stories in 2001, *Gossip Mom*, which made him (in)famous immediately due to the scandal it caused. In fact, some inhabitants of the village wanted to sue Grecsó for using their private lives in his short stories, and even today his mother is ostracized by some in the community in place of her writer son, which experience is reflected *Welcome* as well. Since then, Grecsó has published five novels (the latest in April 2016), has written a play, and several screenplays for Hungarian movies. In addition, he has been working at one of the most acclaimed literary journals, *Élet és Irodalom* ('Life and Literature') since 2009.

His first novel, *Welcome*, was published in 2005 and it already touches on some of Grecsó's main ongoing themes: isolation, searching for one's identity and belonging somewhere are the key themes of the work (Malek "II"). Also, partly motivated by the scandal his previous work caused and partly by a real event, the narrative centers around the issue of the exclusion of one member by a close-knit community and the process of scapegoating. The novel depicts the life of an isolated community far from the cultural and political

center of the country (Budapest, its capital), and tries to faithfully show how people live at such forgotten, abandoned places. While his later novels gradually moved away from the countryside (as Grecsó himself also did, moving first to Békéscsaba, then Szeged, then finally to Budapest), *Gossip Mom* and *Welcome* concentrate on the closed but complete world of the author's childhood. However, the village depicted is far from the idyllic place of childhood reminiscences. Rather, it is a cruel world where the opinions of others are more important than morals, ethics, dignity or truth, and where gossips can easily destroy one's life. Still, the novel contains several light-hearted and amusing episodes, and utilizes the features of detective novels as well, hence the social criticism and the portrayal of xenophobia can never completely dominate the narrative and its tone.

The novel starts with a telephone call on the protagonist's twenty-third birthday from the narrator's native village, which he left seven years ago and has not contacted since then. One of his old friends call him, because the Klein diary, an enigmatic object they tried to obtain as children, has been finally revealed due to the end of the Soviet occupation and the change of the regime. This historical event signals a time of change both for the country and for the narrator, Gergely, who decides to go back to his childhood's location to put an end to the mystery. Most of the novel is Gergely's remembrance of his

childhood in Sáraság, and only at the end of the work does he arrive back to finally read the diary. Thus, most of the novel is a recollection, but it does not follow a linear timeline either: rather, certain events resurface again and again, and the readers get closer and closer to the ‘final big quarrel’ between Gergely and his friends, after which he decides to leave the village permanently, even losing contact with his ‘sister’, Eszter. Besides its unique time, there are also several anecdotic detours on humorous events happening to different characters, which create a complex, loose narrative, reminiscent of the anecdotic novel. The magical space in the novel is the isolated, imaginary village on the Great Hungarian Plain, which area has always been famous for its lack of civilization; a kind of unrefined and primitive place, a symbol of the country's belated development. In addition, the magical act of remembering, investigation and searching for one's identity and one's family is represented by the narrator, who, by recalling all the important details from his childhood, tries to understand his own place and role in the history of the village, and in a wider sense in the country. On the other hand, trauma is presented in a much subtler manner than in the previously analyzed two novels, and there is more emphasis on the individual than on the community in this sense. Also, although there are ghosts and shadows as well, their roles are less obvious than in *The Guest* and *Beloved*, and there are many other magical events in the novel, too.

V.1 The Supernatural Signifying Belonging

Whereas in *The Guest* and *Beloved* the supernatural element is clearly connected to the presence of the ghosts, in *Welcome* there are several magical occurrences. Some of them are part of the local belief system and the villagers seem to accept them as such, simply as natural consequences of everyday life. These otherwise extraordinary, but in the villagers' everyday lives perfectly self-evident occurrences help the community to share a collective experience and they also strengthen the division between them and the outsiders. This is precisely what makes these strange customs so important for the narrator and his group of friends, who are all fatherless or orphans, and who desperately want to belong somewhere—especially the narrator, Gergely. For him, the fact that he is able to experience these events is the fiercely needed proof that he is also part of the community: “I have finally understood ... that for us, Sáraság is a better place than any other village not only because we were born here. It is enough to feel the strange thirst, the flavor of the words before daybreak, the

caress of the ghosts; to put it simply, the nativity; the chosenness; the anxiety”³²
(2).³³

The fact that almost at the end of the novel the narrator finally confesses that he was found in Szeged as an orphan and only grew up by chance in the local orphanage together with Eszter, whom he consistently calls his sister throughout the whole narrative, makes this statement at the beginning extremely ironic. He only tries to pretend to be part of the community, and that is why for Gergely all these mythic events are more important than for others, and the underlying reason why he founds the ‘Klein Association’ with his friends. The aim of this club is to investigate all the fantastic events and reveal the concealed connections between them, but it inevitably fails, leading to a huge dispute between the members and finally culminating in Gergely’s flight from the village, after which he does not even try to contact his peers again. Naturally, all of these unusual but at once natural events help the readers to understand the nature of the community depicted, too, and many times they do not shed a favorable light upon the village.

However, it is also important to see that as opposed to the other two novels discussed, in *Welcome* the magical part of realism is rather a technique used in the novel quite cleverly by the author to deceive the reader. While

³² All the quoted excerpts from the novel are translated to English by me.

³³ Grecsó Krisztián. *Isten hozott*. Budapest: Magvető, 2005. Kindle. Subsequent in-text citations refer to this edition of the novel and will therefore be identified by chapter number alone.

concentrating on the different strange events, readers become immersed in the extraordinary world portrayed, and are unable to notice that the protagonist, Gergely never talks about himself. Whether he has parents or not; where do they live with his sister; what does or did his parents do for a living: these questions remain unanswered, but the reader does not even notice it until the second part of the narrative due to the loose, anecdotic structure and the engaging stories about the villagers. Also, it is emphasized at the beginning that Gergely lost all contact with his home after the ‘big quarrel’, hence his solitude seems partly explained. Therefore, when almost at the end his big secret is exposed, the reader suddenly realizes that what was the collective myth of Sáraság is mainly just the product of a very imaginative, sensitive and lonely child trying to protect himself at any cost, thus creating a magical world out of his almost unbearable life, and when he is confronted about it by his friends, instead of reflecting on their opinion, he just flees the village. Therefore, although almost the whole narrative works as a quite typical magical realist text, and the village is depicted as a Hungarian or Eastern-European version of Macondo, in the end the local myths and legends explained by Gergely emerge as only one version of the truth; perhaps a child’s delusion, perhaps one of the several existing truths and viewpoints. More importantly, though, these

particular myths reflect the subconscious of Gergely and the main themes of the narrative.

Firstly, the villagers of Sáraság are all tormented by an unquenchable thirst, hence carry around an enameled drinking pot (called ‘kanta’, which is a word not used in standard Hungarian) with water for kids and beer for adults, that is, for everyone over thirteen or fourteen. (As a result, the majority of the people are probably far from sober by the evening, which is actually a serious social issue in Hungary, especially in the countryside.) Secondly, every morning on awakening they mutter a few incoherent words and phrases, some in foreign languages, such as ancient Greek, Latin or very often Hebrew, and they have to ask the local priest, who speaks all these languages, or ghosts in order to try to decipher the meaning. Although the priest always tells the villagers not to try to obtain any hidden message, wisdom or prophecy from this heresy, these words are generally considered to be conveying messages from beyond. Thirdly, there are ghosts in the village, but they can be seen solely by mediums, who are able to communicate effortlessly with the spirit world. For them, ghosts are similar to everyday people, and as they can obtain a lot of gossip and other important or interesting pieces of information from them, the mediums are respected and sometimes feared in the community. Also, if there is a mysterious event people are concerned about, they generally ask for these so

called 'kalibers' in order to ask the opinions and explanations given by the dead. In addition, the ghosts' presence is such a natural phenomenon for the villagers that one older male ghost still gets letters from the post office (for instance, summons for the compulsory national lung screenings), because the villagers are afraid to enrage him. Finally, and this is the most crucial for the narrator, women have a strange recurrent dream in which a carriage pulled by dapple-grey horses runs down the main street of the village towards the river Tisza. In its forage rack, it carries the corpse of a murdered girl, and it is driven by either the (probably) dead Ede Klein or by Satan himself.

Not surprisingly, "the thirst, the glossolalia, and the recurrent dream are manifestations of the return of a repressed past" (Csordás). Also, they all evoke a mythical and also a biblical time. The thirst can be read as an allusion to Tantalus in Greek mythology, who was cursed by the gods and chained to a rock in the water, but whenever he wanted to drink, the water receded. He was punished because he killed, cut, boiled and served his own son Pelops to the gods, who was later revived by the enraged deities. Obviously, his deed as well as his punishment can be connected to the collective sin of the village: first of all, they let their own people, three Jewish families, taken to the concentration camps, then they expelled Ede Klein, one of the few survivors who had manage

to return to the village. The glossolalia or xenoglossia³⁴ are both references to the Bible, and can either mean a direct communication with God through the Holy Spirit, or something sinful. Obviously Satan, too is connected to sin. The time of Sáraság is occasionally connected to the time of the Bible before the Great Flood, which again emphasizes the state of being sinned without any absolution. Behind these strange customs there is a real past event, which gives the backbone of the whole narrative, although revealed rather late and in small fragments and its significance is explained even later. Also the narrator learns about it late, and immediately becomes very anxious and also enraged at his peers for not telling him the story of Klein earlier, because he unconsciously feels that Ede Klein and the blood libel surrounding him is of crucial importance for his own identity. Later he even decides to name the club after Klein, because he feels that Klein's story is somehow central in the incidents happening in the village—and he is certainly right, at least from his own perspective.

Ede Klein was a local dyer of Jewish descent, who had returned from a Nazi concentration camp. Not long after the end of the Second World War in Europe, in 1948, a young woman was found dead one morning the day before she was due to be married, and one of the last people she visited was Ede Klein.

³⁴ Glossolalia is speaking incoherent and meaningless words, whereas xenoglossia refers to speaking a foreign language fluently.

The detective in charge insinuated Klein and claimed that he had killed her to use her blood in consecrating a synagogue that was to be rebuilt, then threw the body into the river Tisza. Although the woman's blood had obviously not been drained and there had been no evidence against Klein at all, eventually he was forced to flee the village together with his mother and the other few survivors. In fact, there was a similar blood libel in Tiszaeszlár in the early 1880s, which was definitely known by the author: Tiszaeszlár appears in the novel as one of the words Gergely unconsciously utters after waking up. In Tiszaeszlár, a group of Jewish people (one of them actually called Klein) were accused of the same ritual murder, and even though they were found innocent, the case later served as a basis for growing antisemitism and culminated in the foundation of the National Anti-Semitic Party in 1883. It is still believed by many that the girl was indeed killed by Jews, and the story has become part of the local folklore. Since then, the 'murdered' girl's tomb in Tiszaeszlár has become an Anti-Semitic shrine, where radically right-wing parties occasionally gather on the day of the girl's death to remember the 'crime'.

Even more importantly, in Grecsó's village, Szegvár, there was a similar case after the Second World War, the only difference being the scapegoat's name: Viktor Klein instead of Ede Klein. Just like in reality, in the novel the local people did not forget Klein's alleged crime. Although in the narrative he

secretly returned years later, in 1966 to meet his boyhood love, Panni, who at that time owned the local tobacconist's store, the community still regarded him as a criminal, and even Panni was in danger for giving accommodation to him for one night. Thus, he had to flee again, but fathered a child, who easily could have been the narrator, Gergely himself; in a way he was. Similarly to the hamlet depicted in the novel, in the village where the author was born, which is quite obviously the model for the village portrayed in the novel, the villagers still believe in the guiltiness of Klein, and his sin is part of the collective unconscious of the place even today. Thus, definitely one of Grecsó's aim in the novel is to honor his memory and ask for his forgiveness in a symbolic way, just like Morison and Hwang Sok-yong want to remember and commemorate the dead in their respective texts.

So, in the novel and in real life, Klein was made a scapegoat, who could be faulted for everything which went wrong in the community (and indeed he is faulted for several disasters in the narrative, most importantly for the mysterious diary), and whom the villagers necessarily have to hate, otherwise they would have to admit their guilt. This way, Klein's figure has become a symbol of the collective guilt of the villagers, which explains three out of the four frequent magical occurrences. The returning dream is the return of the repressed past, a consequence of the collective guilt of the community, and the

unquenchable thirst can be understood as the punishment for sacrificing one of their member, similarly to how Tantalus sacrificed his son. In addition, the glossolalia or xenoglossia can refer to several things: first, how the villagers think they are closer to God, hence their accusation of Klein was correct, when in reality it was just their delusion. Secondly, again the return of the repressed past as fragmented thoughts nobody really understands, because they do not want to understand and acknowledge their mistake and guilt. Finally, the ghosts also signal the influence of the past over the present and that the past never dies.

Naturally, Klein's figure is still very much present in the local belief system during Gergely's adolescence, hence when the by then middle-aged Panni, who also works as a typist for the local co-op farm, writes a document in a kind of trance causing a huge uproar, people also connect it to Klein. No one knows exactly what the document contains: the co-op's chairman has sent it by mistake, instead of a 'mood report', to the district headquarter precipitating a huge investigation, which could have meant even death punishment for the chairman and Panni. However, although the document is first called "uninterpretable, repulsive, and jeopardizing the communist world order" (1), in the end Panni is honored as an excellent comrade. Still, the document is locked away in a safe, and no one really forgives her, who is considered to be Klein's old lover. She loses her work as a typist, and people blame her for all the

confusion and agitation caused by the mysterious document that many believe contains the time of one's death. In other words, she is made a scapegoat instead or rather besides Ede Klein. Once, while Gergely and one of his friends, Bece, are away from the village (they are sent to high school in a small rural town, much to Gergely's dismay, who feels he is losing contact with his roots and the village), another member of the Klein Association steals the Klein diary from the safe in the co-op office and reads it to the villagers. However, after reading out of the diary in public, everyone remembers it in a different way: "[t]he sentences were sliding and throbbing, just as Aunt Pannika said about the typing itself: they were dodging, hiding, then smiling from behind the next one. One word turned the meaning completely to its opposite. Yes. Then no" (6). All the listeners felt that the diary was about them and about the present:

The majority of the listeners were most of all surprised upon hearing what is right now, present was happening on the pages, *this*, or rather *that*, that is, the given moment, everyone's separately, and also because this speech had a momentum, a flood that could not be delayed, which could only start from a person who loved someone else a lot. Most people were certain that it was about them and *primarily* about them, even if in the text they saw themselves

compared to others; this was noticed by many: they were always reflected in someone else, still, it was not important who was written about, but rather who was not. Listening to the Klein diary was, said my sister, as if you were speaking. Someone speaks instead of you, but about you, to you. Everything is already written, or rather only what is written exists, and it exists because it is written. (6)

Listening to this diary is presented as a ritual: people are in ecstasy, and Eszter, Gergely's 'sister' does not even think about protesting when an unknown man strokes her private parts. The moment is extraordinary, and after people only remember the "momentum, the rush, the impetuosity" (6), and Ede Klein. The connection to him is death: he is believed to be the ferryman who comes for dead people, and many believe the diary contains the date of everyone's death. Although this event of reading out the diary is a supernatural occurrence and a ritual, slightly similar to the exorcism scene in *Beloved* and *The Guest*, here the community is far from conjuring their ghosts. If anything, people become even more xenophobic and antagonistic towards Aunt Panni and the memory of Klein, and ultimately even to Gergely. Hence this scene can be understood as a failed ritual. A text which could mean anything, and which is

about the present and love, is rejected by the community: they are not ready to release the past and live in the present. In this sense, Klein's blood libel can also be understood as a collective traumatic event, which still has an effect on people many years later, and which recurs only in their nightmares and their fragmented and unconscious thoughts upon awakening, emphasized by the words they utter every morning, mostly in Hebrew, which again signals a connection with the blood libel and Jewish fate in general.

The aforementioned diary is of central importance in the novel, as it induces Gergely's journey back to his village that causes all his memories to reappear. When Gergely finally arrives, he meets Aunt Pannika, who reveals that although he is not her son, he still looks similar to Ede Klein (which is obvious for everyone in the village too). Then, Gergely finally visits his friends, and hears from outside that they are talking about the diary, which, in the end, proves to be empty. He knocks on the door and introduces himself as Gergely Klein, upon which his friend answers: "[f]inally. Welcome" (12); this is how the novel ends. Therefore, the diary serves as a narrative device that both starts and ends the novel, but the significance of which is hidden for a long time and that ultimately has to be explained by the reader, especially given the fact that is empty.

Besides the ‘regular’ supernatural events, such as the thirst, the presence of the ghosts, or the recurring nightmares, there are also strange incidents which unsettle the villagers and serve as a reason for the founding of the Klein Association by Gergely, who wants to solve these mysteries. What they all have in common is the motif of fatherhood, origins, and past, which is one of the main concerns of the novel, and which ultimately leads back to the figure of Ede Klein.

The first of such incidents, which starts the recollection process in the narrative, is the one about the shadows. One day, an enthusiastic photographer appears in the village, who takes cheesy pictures about people in front of their houses, then persuades them to give him all their old photographs so that he can digitalize and reprint them. However, he disappears with the pictures, and when later the enraged villagers try to locate him to get back their photographs, he is not to be found. But the pictures do not disappear: instead, they start to appear on the walls and public places as shadows that look just like the old photographs. (Among others, a photo of Klein is also on the wall of their old house.) The worst happens when Ignác, a young man whose father committed suicide because he was unable to get used to the Soviet regime and his loss of private property, one day loses his own shadow, and instead inherits his father’s: the shadow literally leaves the wall and sticks to his son instead. The

young man becomes desperate and loses his job as a shepherd (the animals are afraid of his strange shadow), but eventually falls in love with the village's ex-beauty in whose mouth a cracker explodes, destroying her face. She is drawn to him because of his father's shadows, and even their child inherits his—that is, the grandfather's—shadow in the end. This is quite literally a miraculous incident about one's past and one's inheritance, and how important it is for one's life. Yet, first Ignác has had to accept his fate and reconcile with the idea that his life cannot be separated from that of his father's in order to move on. When his son is born with the shadow of the grandfather, he is already exhilarated and explains Gergely: "if the past is always here with us, of course we have shadows. And my son ... has already chosen: he respects the past of his fathers" (11). Overall, the whole magical event about the shadows appearing on the walls signify the revival of the past, which all the characters need to face and accept in order to continue living, just as in the other two novels. Ignác seems to successfully and literally embrace his father's shadow, that is, accepts his past and his ancestor's suicide.

Another magical incident which greatly interests Gergely is the sudden and unexplainable death of all the dogs in the village, then the birth of countless puppies the next morning. This event is also connected to origins and to Gergely and his friends' situation: the puppies are born without fathers, just like

them, especially Gergely, whose father is not even known. As an old villager once tells drunkenly to a third party, “those boys are *orphans*, all three of them. ... It is because of the *father*. That none of them has one. ... You know, these guys are so damned stubborn about time, that is, about past, because they don’t have any” (9). Thus, the puppies born fatherless underlie the main theme of the novel, which is being born as an outsider without origins. Also, another magical incident is Franczek Gyula’s case: although he is sterile, he fathers two sons, and both facts are examined and acknowledged by doctors, who cannot come up with any rational explanation. They are confused, still, the villagers find the incident perfectly natural, and they believe the love of Franczek’s wife towards her husband was powerful enough to impregnate the woman. This incident is important in the novel for two reasons: once, this is why Franczek takes the three orphan boys under his wings, as he also has something to prove about his fatherhood; he is also interested in questions of origins, of roots. Secondly, Gergely is in a way similar to Franczek’s sons: he looks like Ede Klein with his curly red hair (quite rare in Hungary), obvious to everyone except him until the end of the novel, but Pannika confesses that biologically he cannot be the son of Klein and her, because that baby was aborted due to its poor health. Still, Gergely accepts the inheritance of Klein and introduces himself as Gergely Klein in the last few lines of the work, accepting the collective fate and

experience of the Jewish community, which is based on ‘fatelessness’,³⁵ strangeness, and alienation from the majority’s culture.

Finally, there is also a ghost who appears frequently in the text through Gergely’s medium friend, Dezső: Uncle Avarka. His role is important, because while also telling countless pieces of gossip about other villagers, many times it is through him that Gergely and his friends obtain information on the strange events, as they are never there when something actually happens. In addition, Avarka’s ghost does not only speak about the past, but gives prophecies concerning the future as well. Most importantly, he warns Gergely’s medium friend about the approaching end of the chosenness of the village: he forebodes that soon “the heat which was there since the beginnings of memory will wear off from our bodies, we won’t have to carry our kantas, full with copper-colored, foaming beer every time we set off, even to our neighbor”, “the ghosts will not return, and we will not have to bury them where they died ..., there will only be a cemetery, like in the countryside, because there is not much time left until the bill is paid” (7). (The countryside refers to all places outside their village, even the capital.) However, no one can truly believe him, as the last year Gergely spends in Sáraság, 1983 is a lot worse than all the years before: “the thirst was getting stronger, already the spring appeared to be merciless, at

³⁵ The title of the most famous work of the Noble Prize winner Imre Kertész about a teenage boy’s experience in the Nazi concentration camp in Aushwitz. (The author himself is also a survivor of the said camp.)

dawn I was howling unconsciously with my mouth dry, most of the time something like ‘you have not offered water to the thirsty’, while others were shouting in a language, familiar but unknown” (7). Naturally, in such an atmosphere the tension also grows between Gergely and his friends, leading to the big quarrel, after which Gergely leaves Sáráság, and moves to the orphanage in Feketeváros (literally: ‘black city’), where his secondary school is located. Finally, once the ghost of Uncle Avarka also appears in front of Gergely, after which he sees a dream about the visit of Ede Klein back to the village, in 1966, which could have been the day Gergely was conceived. Later, Metz, the medium (who knows it from the ghost too) and Aunt Pannika herself also validate his dream, which interestingly foreshadows Gergely’s own visit to Sáráság in 1990: in a way he repeats the return of his father figure, and most probably he will leave the village for good after this visit, just like Ede Klein did.

On the whole, the magical events in the novel are all connected to the isolated place of the village on the periphery. As Csordás observes, “[t]he conceptual schemes and notions that serve to interpret the world always evolve in the centers of a culture and diffuse out to the periphery, which is why they are only loosely and crudely applicable to designating elements and communicating the facts of reality on the periphery.” Indeed, the world of

Sáraság is portrayed as a completely different universe with its own rules, myths and legends, because “the periphery creates such shifting mythical figures to fill the gaps where the local experience of reality fails to correspond with the conceptual schemes.” Moreover, the supernatural events, whether they are part of the villagers’ everyday life or whether they are strange incidents causing uproar and confusion are all connected to Ede Klein and the repressed collective guilt of the community, or in a wider sense to fatherhood, origins and identity. However, the reason behind this is in fact Gergely and his own perspective, who struggles with forging his identity without origins; which is, after all, impossible. Still, whether all the magical incidents are interpreted as solely Gergely’s delusions based on his obsession or as one perspective among many, all of which are more or less magical, the world of the periphery is strongly portrayed as a magical world with its own rules, its closed hierarchy and its belief in determinism and perpetuity without the possibility of change.

V.2 The Language of Anecdotes and Gossip

The language of the novel is quite remarkable for several reasons. First of all, it is characterized by polyphony, and as Kiss observes, “perhaps the novel’s most serious and spectacular virtue is its language” (140), which is

stylistically and rhetorically complex: the narrator's voice is bitter and nostalgic, but the different characters' divergent, sometimes contrasting voices, characterized by simplicity, a sense of humor or benevolent didacticism all mix well together. Also, the language is "at once profane and mythical, spiritual and banal" (Fodor 44), where the text of the Bible can be mixed in the same sentence with phrases about the most ordinary reality, physicality and sexuality. While some anecdotes and dialogues in the strongly rural setting are indeed simple, most of the sentences are long and complicated: many metaphors, similes, allusions, prosopopoeia and synesthesia color the text, and the abundance of the adjectives can even be disturbing in some cases. Also, as Lengyel explains, Grecsó employs "an anecdotic style enriched with magical realism" (157). In fact, according to Papp, the Hungarian folk magical realism is a kind of reinterpretation of the anecdotic novel, which tried to imitate everyday speech and employed a non-linear narrative with several detours, that is, with countless anecdotes. Finally, as Csordás observes, Grecsó adopts the linguistic code of a "typical form of communication in societies on the periphery: gossip", which is a "product of a world whose reality can never assume solid, definitive form because it can be viewed from innumerable viewpoints, from each of which another reality can be seen". Gossip, which is obviously connected to that of the anecdote, strengthens the novel's relationship

to orality and local folklore, which are frequently employed features of magical realism worldwide.

The author's previous work, a short story collection called *Gossip Mom*, which was indeed a collection of funny or disturbing pieces of gossip in a strong vernacular about people in the neighborhood, was already characterized by this at once folkloristic, at once urban use of language. Indeed, Grecsó was considered to be a writer from the countryside and of the countryside by many after his first prose, which used to be a major literary tradition in Hungary. However, he is strongly against categorization. Although he grew up in the village of Szegvár, he felt that he was pulled back by his surroundings, which is why he went to secondary school to Csongrád (the model of Feketeváros, that is, 'Black City' in the novel), then to Békéscsaba (in the novel Tótváros: the word 'város' stands for city, while 'tót' is a Slavic minority in Hungary: many of them actually live in Békéscsaba). Thus, he in fact tried to escape his rural surroundings, and as a first generation intellectual now lives in Budapest as a writer and editor of a literary journal. As a result, his perspective on the village is at once that of the outsider and insider: he inherently knows the language as well as the legends and folk myths of Szegvár, but at the same time he does not belong there anymore, just like his protagonist in *Welcome*.

In his first works, the stories and village myths are thus based on reality. Although in *Gossip Mom* Grecsó mostly used the stories he had heard in his childhood in the village, in *Welcome* he rather relied on stories and strange events he had witnessed or heard about in other cities (Szeged, where he also attended university, Békéscsaba or Csongrád), but as he was so familiar with the internal laws and rules of village life, he could successfully integrate these stories into the world of Sáraság (Grecsó, *Élet és Irodalom* 7). In addition, the language of *Welcome* is also particularly rich in allusions to the Bible as well as in its choice of vocabulary borrowed from the holy book, which was the only book the author's grandparents regularly read (and usually the only book people used to own in the countryside), hence it was a text used and reused in everyday life, indeed part of ordinary reality (Grecsó, *Élet és Irodalom* 8), just as much as the strange, magical, tragicomic or very profane events told in the narrative.

In the end, this strange language that mixes lengthy contemplations on the nature of transcendence, the underlying meaning of different stories in the Bible (with a special emphasis on the books of Job and Enoch), and reflections on the concepts of sin, guilt and punishment with the most ordinary or most scandalous, very often highly erotic events (for instance, when Franczek ponders upon the right of God to impregnate the human soul with blood and misery, and in the background, after a football match, a gipsy sings a very

popular song about boobs weighing three kilograms) successfully mixes greatly divergent voices, such as the bitter and tragic voice of the narrator with the different local characters' tune. Consequently, it gains the ability to create a mythic atmosphere, not unlike the world of Macondo created by García Márquez, where the magical is often more real and believable than reality itself. Moreover, as the author himself explains, he in fact only tried to be very realistic and faithful to his memories (Csáki 28), which is very similar to how Morrison accounted for the presence of the magical in her works: it is part of the reality these people live and believe in, hence while trying to faithfully represent the world of African Americans, or the world of the people on the periphery in a small and closed Eastern-European village, the magical needs to be included. In addition, in the Hungarian magical realist novels the narrative voice is also a reminiscent of a traditional anecdotic style, which is highly appropriate to convey local miracles and the process of how legends are constructed in and by a community as well.

Anecdotic novels were actually the major epic works in the second part of the nineteenth century in Hungary. Most of all, these novels are characterized by the anecdotic narrative structure, that is, a somewhat loose narrative created by the juxtaposition of small, interesting stories which are either true or not, but nevertheless entertaining, and which are always transferred orally, which also

means they circulate in several versions. The anecdotic style is also characterized by a strong presence of the narrator who oftentimes comments on the events and regularly addresses the readers, or rather, the listeners; the usage of the vernacular; the employment of anecdotic characters, which means that the different characters are introduced by means of a memorable, humorous story with a twist, which illuminates their personalities. Besides *Welcome*, this narrative style is also characteristic of other contemporary Hungarian magical realist novels, such as *Zöldvendéglő* (*The Green Inn*) by Béla Fehér or the short stories of Kolozsvári Papp.

Although in case of *Welcome* the anecdotic structure is mostly responsible for the loose narrative mentioned by several critics, which closely resembles the narrative structure of a short story collection, still, as Ménesi observes, the anecdotes tell the most about the protagonist, Gergely (15), hence the text can still be read as a novel. Or, as Kiss points out, the novel is in fact an internal Bildungsroman, where the environment is only a prop, a scenery for the story of the narrator. Thus, it is not really the external world which formulates Gergely's personality, but the other way around: everything gains its meaning through his peculiar character (141), which clearly differs from the traditional structure of a Bildungsroman.

In addition, the frequent use of anecdotes also arouses doubts regarding the credibility of the narrator, or rather, the credibility of storytelling in general. As one of the village's well-known senior characters, the 'Glass-Eyed Tót' tells Gergely at the end of the novel regarding the famous incidents: "[y]es, son, these could also happen. How you interpreted them in your association, well, that's a different story" (12), implying that Gergely's own obsessions made him blind in certain ways and too imaginative in others: he was only concerned about fatherhood, past, inheritance and continuity. On the other hand, as the Glass-Eyed Tót confesses: "[w]hat I can't understand is how someone can create so many parables to himself only to fail to solve any of them" (12), that is, while Gergely was always deeply immersed in these—for him excruciating—problems, he could never understand his own past and inheritance, at least not until the last pages of the narrative.

Moreover, in the novel the anecdotes can function as confessions and also as the catalysts of the construction of local legends (Reményi 169). From the surface of the humorous stories oftentimes deep contemplations ensue, in which glimpses of the collective guilt deeply buried in the community's unconscious can be noticed. In addition, sometimes the anecdotes continue more as confessions, again closely related to the blood libel, which literally overshadows the village's present by the appearance of the shadows. In fact, the

shadow of Ede Klein and his mother even move to another place, directly to the wall of Pannika's store. Thus, the anecdotes become deeply interwoven with the silenced and distorted past of the village and with the main theme of the novel.

Naturally, the nature of gossip is very similar to that of the anecdote in the sense that its credibility is always already questioned. Also, its definition is very similar to how an anecdote can be defined: "[t]he gossip is a non-public information concerning recognizable people others may know, and its main attribute is its spreading"; also "spreading rumors is a characteristic of the human species as a whole, organized in a polyhierarchical way and developed in smaller communities" (Szvetelszky). A piece of gossip only becomes gossip if the listener regards it as such, hence its meaning is always constructed by the listener or the reader (as a result, gossip could be easily interpreted from a poststructuralist perspective); its value always depends on its actuality and to whom it happened to. Also, a rumor does not have one version: it is necessarily a sum total of different versions, as it is never repeated in an entirely same way, similarly to folk stories. In addition, as Timon observes, the rumor or gossip is the perfect symptom of the life of a village and part of its everyday reality, hence an appropriate choice for representing the life of the periphery faithfully, but with a certain tinge of irony, as nobody can know for sure whether the

events described in them are true or not. Moreover, the act of gossiping actively contributes to the cohesion of a social network, in this case, the community of the village: it can weaken or strengthen certain links between its members as well as it can be used against certain members of the community. In *Welcome*, this power is mostly employed against Aunt Pannika, who is even attacked by nameless villagers twice in the novel, and who is considered to be responsible for the confusion surrounding the Klein diary as well as the misfortune happening to Hilda, in whose mouth firecrackers explode. Also, when the police try to find the people who attacked Aunt Pannika and tried to burn her house, nobody knows who did it exactly: everyone only says that someone else, and that no one likes her (because she used to be the lover of a Jew), but the perpetrators are always different people. This is closely related to the nature of gossip again: nobody knows exactly who did it, or who started spreading the rumor, but everyone agrees that Pannika deserves what she got.

All things considered, both the anecdote and the gossip are responsible for the novel's narrative structure, which is a direct successor of the so-called anecdotic novels, and the characters are also descendants of the personalities represented by Jókai or Mikszáth, the two most famous Hungarian authors on the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Also, this narrative mode mixes very efficiently with that of magical realism, thus creating a special

Hungarian alternative of the mode. However, the language of gossips or rather the act of gossiping itself is even more significant in the work, as it is directly related to the tight cohesion of the community and the act of scapegoating, which is one of the central themes of the novel. A piece of gossip can alter the recipient and change their beliefs; certain stereotypes can be strengthened (or appear at all), and if someone is attacked by gossips in such a close-knit community as a small village, they can easily lose their position and reputation forever. The author himself knew this process well: as he confesses, he regards the village as a perfect example of a cast system that never changes, which is why the villagers of Szegvár do not understand how it is possible that the alcoholic and good-for-nothing Grecsó's son has become a 'prominent' person (Sándor 37). As the narrator comments: "losing one's reputation is the worst misfortune that can befall on a person, because the verdict of the village is more important than anything else: even life" (2). This is how language becomes a powerful device and a lethal weapon, destroying the lives of several characters in the novel.

Although gossip is portrayed as quite malevolent in the novel, it can also function as a counternarrative against the dominant discourse. Especially in case of political oppression, language always becomes problematic, which was one of the reasons behind the birth of magical realism in post-colonial countries

from the beginning. In *Welcome* and Eastern European prose in general (set in the Soviet regime or after its fall), language is oftentimes represented as something evasive; something that cannot be trusted, somewhat similarly to how language and speech is presented in Orwell's visionary novel, *1984*, which is alluded to in *Welcome* as well. As it was dangerous for people to speak their real thoughts, they learnt the art of concealment, and paradoxically what was supposed to be a secret was known for all (for instance, stealing and reading out the Klein diary), but what should have been known by the public remained a secret or something nobody believed in (such as the misfortune Bece's grandfather met when he accidentally found the graves of the 1956 revolution's heroes in the cemetery and was imprisoned, interrogated and beaten for days for unknowingly placing a wreath there.) Or, as Reményi phrases it, the novel is "an entanglement of banalities and lies regarded as history by the public on the one hand and profane events that are mystified on the other, without any hierarchy or classification" (170): language in general cannot be trusted, just like public opinion.

Although the village itself is so closed to the world outside that historical events almost seem irrelevant, by a closer look it becomes obvious that it is, again, only the surface. First of all, the whole narrative starts with the withdrawal of the Russian army and the title of the first chapter is "Távárisi

konyec”.³⁶ As the narrator observes, “after the Russkies stagger home”, there is a “wonderful and unfamiliar vacuum left in Hungary, a confused and rootless freedom” (10). Also, it is precisely the end of the Soviet regime which makes it possible for the characters to finally read the diary, leading to the telephone call Gergely receives on his twenty-third birthday, which is his nameday as well (it is the first hint of him being an orphan). Therefore, in fact history is very much present in the novel, even if the villagers seem unconcerned about the historical events sweeping through the country: almost nothing happened during the 1956 revolution, almost everyone still goes to the church, on the annual ritual on the day of the new bread the local priest still blesses the bread behind the podium, and there is only the teacher at school who takes the philosophy of socialism seriously. Hence, the schoolroom is described as a special space of hypocrisy:

All human gesture: clumsiness, honesty, or surprise on a discovery was a stranger in that room, decorated with reports, graphics and plans, the only place in the whole village— including the offices of the Party and the Youth League as well as the town hall—where it was seemly to behave with a Prussian humility in the shadows of the red stars and Uncle Marx, Engels and Lenin. (2)

³⁶ It is Russian written as it sounds in Hungarian; the first word means ‘comrades’, the second is ‘end’ or ‘finish’. In fact, there were posters printed out with this slogan in 1990.

For the school, which should be the place of discoveries, knowledge and genial human gestures indeed to be such a pretentious institution is again quite telling. The children learn and experience life outside, on the streets, in the cemetery, in the bars or in the church, and mostly by listening to others. Of course, not everyone is to be trusted: there is an informer, Oláh³⁷ the barkeeper, “about whom the majority knew that in exchange for becoming a self-employed man quite early, he was the secretly recruited man of the Party”, but right after this piece of information comes the consequence of it: “as usual, nobody listened to him” (2). Again, it shows the discrepancy between secret and public information so common at the time.

Another incident exposing the hypocrisy of the regime is when the mayor is called to the capital for “further ideological training”, after which “he was limping for three weeks, and spoke slightly strangely, because he bit his tongue while being beaten. However, he undeniably rose to an ideologically higher level: he started to neglect the loud blessing [of the bread by the priest]” (4). Obviously, he has only become threatened, and in reality nothing has changed: the priest still blesses the bread annually, and people still believe in the sacred nature of the act, even if it is hidden from the public eye: everybody

³⁷ A word for Romanian minorities in Hungary, also a common Hungarian surname.

knows. Similarly, the crosses are there on the walls of the town hall, only behind the bookcases.

In the same fashion, names are also misleading, just like in certain novels of Toni Morrison, particularly in *Song of Solomon*. The popular bar of the village is called Crematorium, because “when Bece’s grandfather was asked once, what is being built so hurriedly right next to the hemp factory, in a humorous mood he answered, just look at the high chimneys, it is obvious. A crematorium” (2). Some were indignant, still, his answer has become well-known, hence people have started to call the place crematorium, even though “it was not written on it, but alas, there were no buildings then on which their real names had been written anyway” (2). Naturally, this name also alludes to Jewish fate, a central theme in the novel. Also, as Károlyi points out in his essay published in the literary journal *Látó*, the only three settlements which have pseudonyms in the novel are the ones Gergely is connected to, and all the other towns or cities, for instance Budapest, are called by their real names. It indicates that Gergely wants to hide what is most significant for him, hence employs self-created names to refer to these places. Also, his creative imagination transforms these places, just as he transforms the village of his childhood into a mythical place.

Ironically, the only event Communism actually invades the village is after Aunt Pannika's mysterious diary, which is at first followed by serious consequences. For instance, the smoking elementary school students are sent home, the screening of *Star Wars* is cancelled, and people are so afraid that only a few of them go to church during the day, hence Bece's grandfather tells the kids: "[e]verything is destroyed by the Communists" (5). However, the postponed mass at nine in the evening is visited by everyone again (even the mayor), and all villagers repent very seriously. In the end, Aunt Pannika gets a reward for her loyalty, insight and critical thinking in a communist spirit, reversing the situation once again and making the whole process utterly ridiculous and satiric.

Unfortunately, in such a climate people can easily become distrustful and xenophobic. When Bece, under the influence of a Soviet novel "that was compulsory then, so everyone loathed it", goes around the village to selflessly help people in need, nobody believes him; especially because there were "regular stakhanovite offerings, meaning that socialist brigades had to do some obligatorily social work, but in a way as if it was volunteering" (5). In such a climate of hypocrisy and distrust, when everything said can mean its opposite; when secret becomes public information and vice versa; when gossiping can destroy lives and everybody feels they have a right to judge others; when if

someone is said to be guilty, then people believe there must be some reason for it: language becomes untrustworthy, but also dangerous. It has a power, as the Klein diary also suggests, which everyone believes contains the dates of people's birth and death; language and the letter is more powerful than reality itself: "[b]ecause only the written exists, and there is nothing in reality" (3), and it is precisely because of this that Klein can be called a murderer, even if all evidence proves the opposite.

Overall, the language of the novel is first of all characterized by polyphony and a carnivalesque spirit. As Reményi observes, "it is rare to see such a sweeping, all-encompassing, rich oral language, in which the different voices are interwoven and then diverge again with such an ease"; "this speech is itself the metaphor of Life, no different from the often mentioned presence of the Eternal Being (...), who dominates everything and everyone" (169) in the novel. In fact, a carnivalesque spirit can be frequently found in magical realist novels, where "[l]anguage is used extravagantly, expending its resources beyond its referential needs" (Faris *Scheherazade* 184), quite similarly to what Carpentier identified as a baroque spirit of Latin American marvelous real. On the other hand, this language, in which anecdotes and gossips can be created and spread, can also be destructive, and how the political climate influences the use of language aggravates this problem even more. In the end, language turns

into a powerful device in the process of scapegoating, that is, blaming all the misfortune in the village first on Ede Klein and Aunt Pannika, the lover of the Jew, then the protagonist, whose physical appearance and orphan status determines his role as a “sacrificial lamb” (12) in the village. Still, language with its infinite possibilities is also the tool for announcing a newly forged identity, that of Gergely Klein, and by its richness and often self-contradictory characteristics, it also underlies the questionable nature of reality and truth.

V.3 The Magical Space and Time of the Periphery

First of all, time and memory are one of the main concerns of the novel, already emphasized at the very beginning of the text: in its epigraphs. The first, a quotation from Zsigmond Móricz,³⁸ who influenced GreCsó in several ways,³⁹ speaks about the lack of memory in a farmer’s life, comparing it to the change of seasons at farming, the next season washing out, erasing the memory of the

³⁸ The most well-known and critically acclaimed realist writer of prose in Hungary in the twentieth century. He was born in the countryside in 1879 and died in Budapest in 1946. He wrote many novels and short stories about the misery of the poor all over the country.

³⁹ Their most important similarity is their position outside the cultural center, in the rootless world of the periphery. Also, one of their similar themes is leaving the village behind. In fact, Móricz’s novel *Behind the Back of God* is one of GreCsó’s favorite books (Valuska 62), which has several similarities with *Welcome*, especially thematically. For more, see the article of Zsófia Szilágyi “A Falu És a Robbanás: GreCsó Krisztián Isten Hozott Című Regénye Mint Az Életem Regénye Újraolvasása”.

previous one; “the small houses of the village do not preserve any sign, news or memories of the ones who used to live there” (1). However, the second epigraph, quoted from Gyula Krúdy,⁴⁰ claims the opposite: “we are nothing else than a continuation of old times, the footprints proceed on the same road, you need to have a good eyesight to see where the footprints of one generation end and the new generation’s begin” (1). While on the one hand, the novel affirms that “the peasant life has no base of memory” (Csáki 28), on the other everything is already written and determined by our ancestors, and those who do not have fathers, that is, Gergely and his circle of friends, are naturally more inclined to discover the signs which seem to govern the everyday life of the village. Moreover, the paradox caused by the comparison of the two epigraphs foregrounds different aspects of the text: while the first quotation indicates the decaying, always thirsty, perishing world of absence and loss the villagers suffer from, the second one, talking about the past living in us adumbrates the perpetually returning ghosts, their prophesies and the determinism no one can escape from, not even by leaving the village behind. In addition, the narrator’s first name, Gergely, also signifies the will to measure time and keep counting it.

Timewise, there are different possible approaches to the narrative. According to Kiss, the chronotope in the novel is trichotomous (137): there are

⁴⁰ A Hungarian writer and journalist (1878-1933); as opposed to Móricz, an essentially urban writer.

three plus one locations and three plus one time zones, just like there are “three, or more accurately, four members” (1) in the Klein Association as well. The main narrative is set in the present in 1990, when Gergely returns to the village and right after the regime changes; most of the stories told in the narrative happened in the early eighties, at the time of the Association’s foundation and decay; while the blood libel was in 1948, narrated in the past as well. However, there is a fourth time zone in the novel in 1966, when Ede Klein returns to his lover after almost twenty years, visiting from Israel. Interestingly, their reunion with Pannika is recounted in the present, in Gergely’s dream dreamt in the 80s, hence it is a doubly embedded time zone. In addition, when Gergely returns at the end in 1990 and meets Aunt Pannika, their encounter is narrated in the same way, with the exact same dialogues. Obviously, these meetings are of significant importance in the narrative: first, Ede Klein tries to move back to his homeland, where he has to face the undying hatred his fellow villagers still feel against him, and after their first and last sexual encounter, he needs to leave Pannika behind again, who is also unable to follow him, because she needs to stay: the determinism does not let them change their histories. However, Pannika also disappears for almost a year, and the villagers believe she was conceived with the Jew’s baby, which proves to be true in the end. With a final twist, it is revealed that biologically the baby cannot be Gergely, as the fetus

was sick and therefore aborted. Still, Gergely is Klein's son in everyone's eyes, which he accepts and introduces himself as Gergely Klein at the very end of the narrative. Location-wise, besides the three main spaces (Sáraság, Feketeváros and Tótváros) there is also a short but all the more suggestive episode set in Budapest, thus the three plus one structure indeed seems appropriate regarding the chronotope of the novel.

Nevertheless, time in the narrative can be approached from a different perspective as well. Without doubt, there is a "village time" (Szegő) in the novel: the narrator believes that things happen in a deeper, more significant way in Sáraság than anywhere else in the world, hence he suffers in Tótváros where nothing happens, "everything is quiet and humble", and where he can only be a "rootless man of no credentials" (1). No one remembers there to things happened in the distant past: "in the countryside, out of Sáraság the past doesn't breathe, you don't run up against the roots all the time", and "the gestures, movements of the ancestors are not there in anything at all" (8). On the other hand, this so-called village time of Sáraság is almost completely independent from the time and history of the country, but instead, it has "a mythical significance: in this dimension of time, there is a straight, linear, continuous connection between biblical time and the present of Sáraság" (Szegő), hence the village in its atmosphere is more similar to a biblical location than a real village

in Hungary during the Soviet regime. Naturally, this particularity greatly adds to the magical realist reading of the text.⁴¹ In fact, there is a particular connection with the flood from Genesis. It is already suggested in the recurring nightmare of the women:

In the dream, a cart pulled by gray horses races along, on it the young and dead body of a virgin called Matildka. The handle of the whip is a cross, with which the devil's dog-headed servants beats the scarred, drenched horses. ... Around, blood is splashing everywhere, and the Azazel Street ... is disfigured by enormous footprints. The asphalt is ruptured, and blood is collected at the bottom of the huge footprints, just like water in pond leaks... (3)

The footprints are made by non-human creatures, who are directly responsible for the flood: "the sons of God saw the beauty of human women, came down from heaven, married them, and from their union, giants were born. This caused the flood, my friends. This guilty fornication" (3), and it is the footprints of these same giants that cover the street of Azazel: again, a biblical

⁴¹ In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez uses a quite similar narrative strategy: Macondo is almost hermeneutically closed from the outside world, and even the technical inventions are introduced in a magical way through the gypsies. However, some historical events still influence the place in a significant way.

allusion. Thus, the time of Sáráság is linked with the time before the flood, that is, the time of sin. Obviously, sin in this case refers to the collective scapegoating of Ede Klein and his eventual expulsion from the village, which is also emphasized by the frequent mention of Azazel, who is the original scapegoat in the Bible.

Secondly, there is the time of the narrator's life, which is both cyclical and linear. While he is at home in Sáráság, time is rather circular, that is, the same events are being retold again and again with greater insight as well as the incidents happening are all similar to each other in their nature. However, as Gergely is gradually torn out from the "simply beautiful and mysterious, closed and protective" (12) world of his childhood, first by attending secondary school in Feketeváros, his life becomes more and more linear, culminating in him fleeing the village, after which his life is recounted in a completely linear fashion and very briefly: he moves to another orphanage, graduates secondary school, moves again to Tótváros to study for a bachelor's degree, graduates and starts working in the local library until his old friend, the medium Metz calls him on his birthday.

Thirdly, there is a "Hungarian time" (Szegő), which influences Sáráság only a few times, the most memorable being the scandal around the Klein diary and the imprisonment of Bece's grandfather. It seems to suggest that when a

villager leaves behind his safety, that is, his home and enters the Soviet Hungary, he can become a victim in no time, as he does not know anything about the world out there. In the end, Hungarian time finally overlaps with Gergely's time in the present of the narrative: as Hungary is freed from the Soviet army, Gergely also matures to an adult and obtains his own name, not given to him arbitrarily by an officer in an orphanage. However, the time of the village seems to continue as it always had: Metz, his medium friend is lost in his alcoholism, and now, from an outsider's point of view, he rather seems to be a lunatic than a medium possessed by spirits and supernatural knowledge; Bece is still an amateur artist who could not get into university to officially study arts; Franczek, the extra fourth member Gergely has never liked, committed suicide. There is decay everywhere in the village, the seeds of which were already there from the beginning, only Gergely was blind to see them at first. The people are as xenophobic as in 1948 and hate the memory of Ede Klein, hence when Gergely is spotted by a nameless villager, he is shouted at as: "Clear off, you filthy Jew" (12), just like his adopted father; only Pannika comes to his rescue, similarly to Ede Klein's visit in 1966. As these dialogues and events suggest, time only flows for the country and Gergely, but not for the village, which is somehow stuck in time, unable to change, which is a feature of trauma narratives in general, as already discussed.

Thus, multiple plurality characterizes the temporal structure of the novel. There is a biblical time in connection with the mythical time of the village, while the time of Gergely's life and the time of the country all appear, overlap and then separate again, creating a quite complex narrative structure. This centrality of time is especially important in connection with memory and roots, that is, individual and collective history as well. When Aunt Pannika indignantly asks Gergely whether he could imagine her abandoning him, he only thinks without answering: "[t]his so-called 'abandonment' happens before time, the starting point of being an orphan is before zero, it does not exist, instead we at the institute have always imagined a new reality" (12): which, in his case, is creating a collective past of the village in order to hide his lack of individual past.

In addition, the location is quite important in the novel: it is set in a village, on the periphery of history and mainstream culture. As Grecsó phrased it, "the village, however closed, is a whole universe in itself. Towns are different: there, people always measure everything to the capital; they are conscious of being on the periphery and full of longing for the center" (Sándor 37). On the other hand, in such a small village people have the luxury not to care about the world outside, hence they can indeed create a complete universe in itself: "a closed world where time is stopped" (Krivánszky 113), and which,

in a good sense, can provide a protective and safe environment for the members of the community. They all feel entitled to a strong sense of pride, a pride to belong to their community others 'in the countryside' regard as a strange place full of lunatics. When the people at Sáráság realize that only they can see the shadows on the walls, "the fear and enthusiasm they felt changed at once into the arrogant pride of the indigenous, and the astonishment turned into a bizarre case of snobbism" (1), and people immediately start to pretend as if it was an ordinary thing to see the shadows of the dead. However, this closedness possesses its own dangers as well: in the narrative, just like in real life, it results in xenophobia. The only magical incident out of Sáráság is at once a reminder of this closedness and an allusion to Jewish history: in Feketeváros, several girls' hair turns into white (which people believe is caused by homosexual love life), and their heads are shaved on the order of school authorities. They are unable to resist and accept their punishment just like Jewish people; they return to their respective villages, humiliated and ostracized for their remaining lives due to their shaved heads and what it implies.

Besides being a closed world with fixed hierarchies and strong stereotypes, in a small village like Sáráság no one can break away from their destinies determined by their genes and parents, that is, the roles their parents play in the community, and this is the reason why both the author and Gergely

eventually need to leave. Closed, protective places pull people back: outside there is danger, but there is also a possibility for change. Therefore, Gergely needs to leave in order to see himself from another perspective and to get unstuck in time, but at the same time he also needs to return to face what he was there. However, all his friends and acquaintances, even Aunt Pannika, cannot break away from the village and its determining influence on their lives.

As for Gergely, his splitting from the village and his old self starts with a physical movement: commuting to secondary school. There, Gergely realizes that he is getting further away from his self in Sáraság, but at the same time he cannot be himself in Feketeváros either. He is at once characterized by the “arrogance of being different and a hysterical longing for assimilation” (3), which is, apart from his particular situation as an orphan pretending to be unaware of his lack of parentage, is in fact a normal psychological process, part of growing up and being a teenager. After they start to commute to high school, Gergely also gradually realizes that they are being deceived by their friends staying at home: “[w]e were tricked, just like all strangers seeking for others’ private lives: collectors of folk songs, ethnographers, sociologists, and people mad for dialects” (7); they are not aware anymore of what is really happening in the village, hence Gergely misinterprets several comments or events, which he realizes only when, before the big quarrel, he has a serious conversation with

his ‘sister’. On the other hand, though he definitely loses something, instead he starts to see himself through the lens of others, of outsiders, which enables Gergely to make conclusions about his village, and especially about how Aunt Pannika and Ede Klein were and are treated. Thus, he starts to comprehend that the magical world of the periphery, although it gives the illusion of safety and eternity, is ultimately only an illusion, as it is proven by the few occasions history suddenly appears in the narrative. Not to mention that while contemplating village life from the outside, its injustice and inequity is all the more noticeable, just like the decay and loss characterizing Sáraság.

The narrative space of the novel is in fact closely related to the temporal structure of the text and the role they both play at the act of remembering. As mentioned above, time flows differently in the village located on the periphery: both its temporal and spatial qualities are significant and connected to each other. Sáraság is the place of childhood and of childhood memories, and while living in Tótváros, Gergely can only think about his former home “as a whole”: all the strange incidents, the places, the years spent there, “everything is together, in one. Space and time are in one lump, and I can never knead this dumpling again; I don’t try to disunite the mixed colors, smells. ... I never recall anything separately” (1). However, the phone call disrupts his temporary peace of mind, and Gergely cannot resist “the slimy and painful stream of

remembering”. He is finally determined to “disjoin everything into tiny pieces”, knowing that “the big whole will become countless strings, several conflicting details” (1) again. As illustrated in this excerpt, which is quite clearly a Proustian beginning of the narrative, time and space is represented as parts of the same concept, serving as building blocks of memory, and as such, the narrative space of the novel is indeed inseparable from its time. While location-wise the narrative present is set first in Tótváros, then on the train to Sáraság, and finally, in the village itself, the memories recounted are mostly set in the village, and they only become accessible by Gergely’s movement in physical space interwoven with the temporal movement to the past, that is, remembering.

This process starts with the recollection of the most enigmatic incident: the “case of the unowned shadows” (1). However, as Gergely confesses, he cannot be sure “how the layers are piled on each other”, whether the shadows, the diary, the recurring dream or other events are more significant than others: “none of them could have been without the others ..., just like all of them are their own antecedents as well” (1). Still, the case of the shadows is doubtlessly a central metaphor of the novel, “its key” (Krivánszky 112), which includes the theme of time, eternity, and inheritance as well. Nobody understands what happened exactly, what kind of extraordinary power the photographer had that by taking the old pictures, he could free them. As Metz suggests, perhaps “he

can read the wrinkles on the faces, the crow's feet, the eyes ...; he can displace the moment which was imprisoned eternally by the photograph" (1).

In fact, choosing old family photographs is a quite appropriate strategy by the author as a starting point to the investigation of time, place and memory. The photograph is by itself an object which captures time and freezes a moment in a specific place; a "temporal" and "shared hallucination" (Barthes 115), which has the power to even belatedly influence our own memories. Also, which is particularly emotionally loaded in case of the pictures of deceased relatives or acquaintances, there is "literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being ... will touch me like the delayed rays of a star" (Barthes 80). By looking at the picture of Ede Klein and his mother, Pannika can still feel the reality of them being there, while for the villagers it is a reminder of their collective crime. Also, their own family members' shadows carry different burdens for everyone.

However, the interesting thing is how the incident where the photographs come alive as shadows change the underlying meaning of what a photograph truly is. As Barthes explains, "[w]hen we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not

move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies” (57). This is exactly that is changed in the narrative: the people frozen in the pictures do *emerge* and do *leave* the artificial world of the photograph, appearing as shadows on the walls, hence becoming parts of the life of the community again. In this magical world, the deceased ancestors are there with the living; nothing ever dies, which is why ghosts can appear as well to the chosen few, who are linked by the possession of this supernatural ability “stronger than blood” (1). And Metz, the medium, who understands more than his friends about the power the past living in everyone has, tells Ignác, who seems destroyed by his father’s shadow: “[u]ntil you don’t feel your father’s shadow your own, he will loathe you too” (7). His words prove to be true. Accepting the shadow of the ancestors means accepting the past, responsibilities and inheritance of the forefathers, and there is no other choice, because the past “sticks”, which is why several incidents end up being called “the sticky cases”; “[y]ou need to stick to somebody, you have to. The dead stick, and death too, only the present does not, the now, the fact that we are here, that doesn’t stick” (3). The present is not important, only when it becomes past, and it is always already determined by the ancestors, by the characters’ genes. This is what is meant by the photographs coming back to life, and although they do not speak, everyone sees them as opposed to the ghosts,

and sometimes they can move as well, just like the father of Ignác's shadow who sticks to his son.

Quite significantly, the shadows of Ede Klein and his mother move as well: they “float” directly to the tobacconist store of Pannika, and “[t]here were no painted doors, no yellow stars that would have been a more exact sign” (8) of sin. At least, according to the interpretation of the villagers, who take this movement of the shadows as evidence against Aunt Pannika. They believe that this is the Jew's way of expressing his gratitude to his servant for writing the diary noting down the exact time of everyone's death. Actually, Pannika becomes a shadow as well: after being attacked and beaten in her store, “her silhouette was baked into her chair and the background. Like in photos of Hiroshima, where after the destruction the shadows of people walking in the park, the lovers' cuddling contours on the stairs of the museum remained” (9); like a photograph. Gergely understands then that Aunt Pannika also “has become part of the forever accumulating, moving and changing past, rewritten again and again” (9), but at the same time also realizes that her role is that of the scapegoat that she can never escape from as long as she stays in the village.

In like manner, the presence of the past is why faith is important for Gergely and how the church becomes a holy place in the narrative:

In the house of God, the past was with us, we were also longing for our forefathers, because this daze called life is only for a few and only temporary, the majority, our blood, are dead for a long time. The believer discovers his roots in himself, at the time of christening everyone is waiting there, back to ten, twenty generations, and the souls become full of them, with the peasants who are essentially the same hence to whom it is easy to remember until infinity. (7)

However, as it becomes clear at the end of the novel, in case of Gergely there are no forefathers (or rather, there is a whole race, but only in a symbolic sense), hence faith in the narrative becomes only an illusion, too. It is even true for Christianity as a whole: while walking in the Jewish cemetery, Gergely “breathes the past”, but also feels that they are all “left without an inheritance, the first part of the testament is missing, our fellows, the descendants of the first testament’s race have become ash and dust”; Christians are “left alone, with the new testament, which is frail, forceless without the old, just like the old cannot function without the new anymore” (8). It also suggests that with what happened to the Jews during the Second World War, Christianity and faith in general cannot strive anymore. As a consequence, the link to the past has been

weakened. In case of Gergely, about whom people “whisper” that the only topic he obsesses about is “that everything has happened before, and we only relive it, as a year, again and again, spring and summer, Christmas and Easter, seeing only thousands of reflections of sadness and happiness in all the anniversaries” (10), there is also no past he knows about. In the end he understands that time does not flow only backwards but forward as well: “time has a thousand eyes, and things are not only reflected backwards. Although we were watching its reverse, time has been stumbling forward as well, unmercifully and unfairly” (10), hence his mistake resulted in the fact that he lived in the past instead of the present. Of course, he only realizes it from the distance, both spatially and temporally, when the past becomes memory.

V.4 The Identity of the Scapegoat

Besides being a kind of detective novel about the contents of the Klein diary, *Welcome* is definitely a Bildungsroman as well, but one whose narrative strategy is in fact closely related to its features as a detective novel. Gergely is gradually discovering his self in the narrative, too, and hides the fact of his lack of parentage from the readers until the very end. In this sense, there is an allusion to that of Oedipus, who was also investigating a crime only to recover

his own past. Instead of recovering the diary, Gergely becomes mature enough by the end of the novel to choose a past for himself, while at once accepts his rootlessness. Also, the Klein diary contains basically everything people want to see in it (for the xenophobic villagers, more evidence against Klein and Pannika), thus, for Gergely it can be empty at the end: he has made his decision regarding his fate and identity, and he does not need the document any more.⁴² He has nothing to prove or disprove regarding the life of Klein and his parentage: he accepts Klein as his symbolic father, hence accepts Jewish fate and the experience of being an outcast by the majority.

As seen from the above analyzed spatial-temporal structure of the novel, the process of memory and remembering serves as the novel's catalyst. While the readers follow how Gergely embarks on a journey leading him home, in the meantime recalling the events about his gradual disengagement from the village leading to his eventual flight, it becomes clear that Gergely reaches a hard-earned maturity by the end of the novel. Consequently, the novel can be read as a *Bildungsroman*: the young hero tries to understand the society and his place in it, struggles with the meaning of his existence, and leaves his home for a long

⁴² A suggestive explanation for the final emptiness of the diary by Kiss is that the events experienced at childhood, which at that time seemed compelling, lost their significance, hence the narrative is only "a reconstruction of a reality which cannot be lived through again, with a bitter aftertaste" (141). However, the past never ceases being important in this novel, thus interpreting the diary's state as an evidence of Gergely's maturity, who does not need any more proof regarding his identity, seems more convincing.

period of time, by the end of which he becomes an adult. However, one of the major differences from a more traditional Bildungsroman is that in *Welcome* most of the changes happen inside one's mind, and Gergely is not so much influenced by incidents happening around him and decisive people in his life than explains everything according to his own inclinations. The real trial, just like for Oedipus is, to wake up from his dream world and accept reality, and the event which affects him most is the big quarrel followed by his own spatial movement out of the village, which finally changes his perspective, thus allowing him to have a more critical attitude towards the village. As Onagy observes, due to this spatial movement Gergely "is freed from the choking closedness but loses the assurance given to him by the center" (107), which is in fact part of the natural psychological process of growing up, only a lot more emphasized in his case. Also, his assured identity in the village is in fact a lie, so, while forging a new, stable identity, he needs to face his self-delusion too. Also, another difference is that while in a Bildungsroman the protagonist usually accepts the values of society and in turn becomes accepted by the same society, in Gergely's case the opposite occurs: he realizes the deficiencies exhibited by the members of the community, and stops waiting for an acceptance that is never going to happen.

To reach maturity, first Gergely has to lose all of his (fake) self-assurance and stop perceiving everything ‘in the countryside’ as inferior. At this stage, Gergely loses his sense of identity so strongly that when a teacher expresses his joy over Gergely joining the Arts class, because there are so few boys there, Gergely is almost “flying from happiness” (7) that his gender can be recognized by others. This example shows how completely Gergely doubts himself and feels uncertain and rootless in the world. Still, this complete confusion is necessary to reconstruct his self; after this stage and partly due to the big quarrel, he can at least start to rebuild his identity from the start. However, for the success of this project he needs to remember all his childhood, which is precisely what the novel is, which deceives the reader the same way Gergely has deceived himself all his life, thus exposing his delusions and self-deception before the final clarification.

Although on the surface the ‘big quarrel’ happens because Gergely’s friends are fed up with his behavior, with his obsession with the past and his pretense to know about fatherhood, inheritance, and the collective past of the community, in reality they only help him by exposing his whole life's deception. He is nothing else than “an overcompensating outsider who tries to find his identity and bonding” (Lengyel 157), but ironically he cannot find it as long as he does not give it up. When his friends make him confront his own past, he

feels that his protective world “has collapsed”: his “shield is choking” him, his “cherished and blissful universe has turned into hell”, and his “roots have betrayed” (11) him instead of nurturing him. Later, while recollecting this event at the end of the novel, Gergely remembers reading Orwell’s *1984* and realizes that he himself was his own most terrible thing, and calls himself “the shadow number 101” (11). His friends make him realize that however he acts as if there was a collective past of the community, he will still not have one of his own. Even though they are right, and even though Gergely is not even sure whether they really attacked him or only whispered about it or suggested something about him being an orphan, he knows they knew that “whatever they say or do about it”, it is “irredeemable” (11). At least that is what he thought as an adolescent, and it was his conviction during the years he lived ‘in the countryside’, blaming his friends for the split. At last, in the last scene he seems to grasp his friends’ intention, and realizes they were right, but also the fact that Sáraság is not his home anymore, and that due to his Jewish heritage, perhaps he will never have a home in the future either.

Observing the question of identity in a broader sense, the author also confessed several times that he is deeply interested in the past, especially in individual past and family histories: “I am always drilling holes into the past, tearing wounds, contemplating consolations. My obsession, that is, searching

for identity does not let me go”, and admits that all his novels can be read as “the patchworks of one life story” (Karácsony, “Emlékezés” 30). His first novels, *Welcome* and *Dance School* (2008) concentrate more on the individual and their relationship to the community, while his third novel, *There Is Room for You beside Me* (2011) is the reconstruction of family histories, similarly to how puzzle pieces are put together. Finally, *Going After You* (2014) is more personal, confessing a man’s struggle (Matkovich 40), while, again, searching for his identity and place in the world, narrated by following his different relationships with women. Still, the main concern remains the same: discovering and clarifying one’s roots, so that the protagonist is finally able to “reconcile with his own self” (Karácsony, “Örökölt Sorsok” 28) as a result of digging up the past. All his narratives are strongly autobiographical as well, and particularly *There Is Room for You beside Me* builds upon the author’s own family history.

When asked about the reason for his interest in family stories, Grecsó answered that in general there seems to be a renaissance of family sagas in Hungarian literature. According to him, the reason behind this phenomenon is that “we are surrounded by generations without an identity, who feel that the ‘Hungarianness’ presented by the extreme right-winged parties are alien to them, however, they want to acquire roots” (Mátraházi 28). The parents’

generation have painstakingly hidden everything in their past to be able to assimilate and they believed that it is better for the children not to know anything. Still, children, while growing up, instinctively look for their place in the world and history. About the village he grew up Grecsó also stated that “amnesia is a defense mechanism” (Grecsó, *Élet és Irodalom* 7): people forget what they do not want to remember, mostly family stories. In the parents’ generation, who were adults during the socialist regime, there was no chance to break away from the softer dictatorship of Kádár and his way of Goulash Communism. Instead, people became secret alcoholics, and “they could not pass on our grandparents’ strength and their will to fight” (Pungor 25). Therefore, a whole generation of rootless people emerged, without enough willpower to fight or lead a meaningful existence.

In *Welcome*, this rootlessness is emphasized by presenting its major characters as orphans. Not surprisingly, their Klein Association is also a metaphor for digging up the past and cognition in general. For Gergely, roots would be everything: quite tellingly, when he visits Aunt Pannika at the end and incidentally breaks her flowerpot, he concentrates on the roots of the philodendron: “it turns inside out from the pottery, I see the roots all coiled up from under, there was almost no soil in the pot, only the roots turning into each other, wriggling without any order: life developing out of sight for long years”

(12). As for the flower, there are almost only roots which remained, as opposed to Gergely, who only has soil.

On the other hand, Aunt Pannika has very strong roots. It is revealed to Gergely by two rabbis while traveling on the train that she is from a prominent, noble family with a long history, whose estate used to be there in Sáraság (ironically, their castle has been transformed into the orphanage Gergely lived at), but she had to hide her identity in the socialist regime, hence she has changed her name. Also, she used to be a favorite student of one of the most well-known Hungarian authors, Ferenc Molnár before the pogrom (he was Jewish), and could have been a talented stage director under his guidance. She also hid Jewish people during the Second World War, and helped Ede Klein, with whom she was romantically involved before the blood libel. So, she is the opposite of Gergely in this respect, but in a way they are also similar: they are both outsiders and insiders in the village at the same time. Moreover, they are connected by the figure of Ede Klein, whom Gergely resembles. He also feels this connection instinctively, feeling something similar to an “electric shock” (5) every time Aunt Pannika is mentioned. What is more, when his friends gossip about her alleged child, whom she gave up to foster care because she was supposedly afraid “that the Jewish child is going to kill” because “it is in his blood”, Gergely always feels “dizzy” and a “terrified anxiety, stupid fear”

he always feels when Pannika is mentioned, already when he “first heard about her scripture” (9). Referring back to the parallel with Oedipus, both protagonists were already unconsciously aware of their past even before they were ready to admit it.

Although Gergely is particularly lacking in respect of roots and family history, his two friends also lack a father. Metz, the medium becomes an orphan early, too, and Bece has only a mother and a grandfather: his father abandoned them for another woman and a new family in the capital. As the Glass-Eyed Tót explains during a remarkable anecdotic event to a stranger, “these guys are so into the past because they don’t have any”: it is something “you can’t get from a mother. They are saints ..., but don’t have roots in time. Only in space”, hence “if a man doesn’t have a father, then there is nothing behind him, only great emptiness, sorrow and grief”. He also adds that there are no fathers in a true sense anymore, fathers who are able to provide a past for their children: they “collapsed, faded, they would all shamefully escape from being a prophet. They wouldn’t even lead their families to the border of the village, not talking about crossing the Red Sea” (9), which leads back to the topic how men and parents cannot properly raise their children anymore due to the effects of the Socialist regime.

Also, the Glass-Eyed Tót expresses his compliance with the boys' effort to discover the past, because he also believes that it is important. He directly quotes one of the epigraphs, strongly expressing his opinion: it cannot be that nothing is remembered; the life of a peasant cannot be similar to how the seasons change. His character has two monologues, this and another one directly to Gergely at the end, and based on these and how he quotes from the epigraph, he can be regarded as the author's alter ego. Also, he is a prophet (he foresees the death of Bece's father in Budapest), and he is the one who tells Gergely that his real parents are in fact Klein and Pannika, whatever his genes say. Therefore, it can be concluded that the narrative's logic also supports the second epigraph, similarly to what the Glass-Eyed Tót expresses, as opposed to the first, and the ending also suggests that in order to forge an identity, one needs a past, or at least needs to choose a community and a family they want to belong to.

One of the central concerns of the novel, apart from the problem of time and memory, is the process of how a community ostracizes its members. On the one hand, the author himself was affected by a similar exclusion due to his previous short story collection *Gossip Mom*. On the other, Grecsó was also outraged by the real blood libel of Viktor Klein, and wanted to remember him, to commemorate their unjust suffering: that all Jewish families were killed or

chased away, and only “their lack remained” (Csáki 28) in the village where people still believe in their crime, despite every evidence against it. Therefore, it can be stated that in general, the author is interested in outcasts (just like some of his predecessors, Mikszáth, Móricz and Krúdy), and especially how a close-knit community treat those who do not belong.

Accordingly, as Károlyi observes, *Welcome* it at once a Bildungsroman, a secret’s novel (a detective story), a belief-novel, and a village-novel as well: it presents the countryside realistically as it is, the place where “there are no Jews, only Jewish cemeteries” (*Hazatérés* 55).⁴³ Indeed, Jewish people were ostracized for being different, and somehow faulted for their own misfortune, as if there was no punishment if someone would not be guilty, which is a natural psychological process represented many times in literature. Of course, it is reflected by those who suffer from being treated as guilty, too: they also feel at fault after a while, and start believing in their sin, accepting their punishment as just. This process is what seems to be of interest to Grecsó: how people become aggressive when they are afraid and feel powerless, impotent to do anything; how people start to blame others for their own misfortune and hardships (a classic case of scapegoating, analyzed in connection with the Holocaust several

⁴³ Recently, there have been a few books regarding the problem of why Jewish people did not remain in the countryside, even if they survived the Holocaust (for instance *Departure and Homecoming* by Konrád or *The Photographer’s Posterity* by Závada), but it is a relatively new theme in Hungarian literature.

times); how innocent people, after becoming targets of severe aggression, humiliation and blame, start to feel as victims deserving their fate, just like many Jewish people in the death camps.

These doubts about sin and punishment gnaw at Gergely, too. When Aunt Pannika is attacked in her store, he starts crying, “perhaps from fear, but rather from hatred, I hate everything and everyone, Aunt Pannika too, and those who attacked her too, because they crushed forever the basis of safety and peace in me” (9). Thus, he also feels the same fear, impotence and hatred as his fellow community members, but he would not attack anyone out of this impulse. Instead, he realizes that “if it is possible that someone is chased to the desert due to the sins of others as a scapegoat”, then “everyone can meet the fate of Job” (9), and he decides he does not want to live in a place like that. It is at once a symbolic moment for him, the losing of innocence as part of growing up, but also the first time he feels completely alienated from Sáraság. He is outraged by the fact that the perpetrators are not caught and that there are no witnesses to the crime. No one has seen who beat Pannika either; everyone telling the policemen that “it is said”, “he heard it like that”, “people were angry in the village. Others. Not him. Always the others. And they were furious. Other people”, which is a perfect example of how responsibility is never taken in case of a collective crime. Instead, everyone blames Pannika: it was her fault

for becoming the lover of a Jew and writing him a book of the dead; “she was looking for trouble” (9). After this incident, even Gergely starts to have doubts about himself, about whether he has sinned or not: “however incredible it seemed, I started to believe that I’m a sinner too, I’ve experienced, or become one with the evil stupidity, I started to have a scathing guilt, I seriously believed that I am the I-don’t-know-what they say I am” (9). The words he remembers the next morning after Aunt Pannika is beaten are: “[r]eservation, scapegoat, shoelaces, barbed wire” (9), which clearly reveal his unconscious state of mind and allude to Jewish fate. A community is powerful enough to make its members believe in their own innocence or culpability, and as the villagers do not wish to face their mistake upon Klein’s blood libel, and especially not the inhumane treatment Jewish people suffered during the Second World War, they have to treat Pannika and Gergely the same way in order to be able to continue living their lives in peace.

Thus, this whole incident causes Gergely to start contemplating the nature of sin. He starts to understand the process of scapegoating, that people think “as if it was her fault that she was hurt, that she was pulled out of her store and kicked, and that she was torn with such a force that her shadow remained on the swivel chair. Things like these can only happen to people who deserve it”, and he thinks about Job, the saint of Sáraság, and his reward for his

unyielding faith. “Is everything has a reason, and only the guilty are punished, like the coward and stupid peasants say, or is it only the wickedness and dread talking from them” (10)? Naturally, this question is very important for him, that is, for his own self-evaluation. If he was punished from his birth, is it because he was determined to be a sinner? Or is he punished innocently, just like his chosen mother and father were? Moreover, why was Job punished by God? His story is a recurring one in the novels discussed: in *The Guest*, it was also pondered upon by the protagonist. Not surprisingly, as he can be linked to the nature of God (if he wagers with the devil, and destroys a believer’s life, then is he such a benevolent God?) as well as to suffering without a reason, as most victims of collective trauma need to suffer, whether they are the victims of slavery, war or xenophobia. Of course, if examining the problem from another perspective, as it is presented in *The Guest*, no one is completely innocent: human beings all commit crimes, and they need faith, just like Job, to reach salvation. However, Gergely’s conclusion is different: he rather accepts the shared fate of those who were wronged, who are ostracized even though being innocent, and this is how “Jewishness becomes the metaphor of exclusion” (Csáki 28) in the narrative. Also, interestingly, Jewishness does not necessarily mean being Jewish: the two ancestor saints protecting the village, Noah and Job,

standing for “flood and thirst”, and “punishment and “misery”, respectively, (8) were also not one, and perhaps, neither is Gergely.

There are several excerpts in the text which show how the idea of Jewishness gradually becomes one with being ostracized by the majority, but the most relevant paragraphs are all at the end, similarly to how Gergely intellectually understands the implications of this idea only at the time of his homecoming. After Aunt Pannika’s attack, a sign is posted on the billboard of the town hall stating that “racial incitement is punishable by law”, which everyone knows is the exact same text posted after the expulsion of Klein; although “everyone in the village knew that Aunt Pannika wasn’t a Jew, the sign was thought not only obvious, but appropriate” (10). When Gergely and his friends see the sign, Bece comments: “it seems you don’t have to be born a Jew to become one”; Metz remarks that “for these, we are Jews, too”, and Gergely retorts with “to them, with pleasure” (10). What he already felt instinctively, he finally grasps when he meets Pannika. After she confesses him that she only remained in the village for him, and that “exclusion made you my son”, he requests from her to accept him as a Jew. However, she answers that it is “nonsense”, that is, “it doesn’t mean anything” (12), because she is also not Jewish. Gergely realizes he does not need an acceptance from anyone; he only has to decide his fate for himself.

Lastly, Gergely meets the Glass-Eyed Tót at the end, on his way to his friends in order to finally read the Klein Diary. In his big monologue, the old alcoholic confesses Gergely that he agrees with him: “the past lives on in us, in our gestures, our speech ..., the time of the ancestors is hiding in our genes” (12). Ironically, he refers to the genes one possesses, even though it remains a question from where exactly Gergely inherited his genes. Thus, in the narrative, inheritance is more like a collective experience, and Gergely does not only inherit the genes of his parents: instead of them who remain unknown till the end, he carries in his genes the history of a race, or rather the history of those who are always currently disinherited by history. To explain his argument, the Glass-Eyed Tót also refers to the case of the girls whose heads were shaved:

You have seen your classmates with shaved heads ..., who were humiliated far away from their homes, only to be disgraced again in their houses, with bald heads, as if they had returned from a treatment, from the death camps, with the suspicion of an infection, just like Ede Klein. Those who lost their homes the same as you, that they still had a stub, a bonding, but the village cut everything, repudiated them; even after seeing this, you haven’t thought about your own fate. (12)

Also, about Pannika he observes that “she has done so much good” and saved so many lives, but still “got to a Jewish fate”: she had to flee due to hiding Jewish people, and came back to the village “almost as a kid, without anyone to lean on to ..., she was an orphan, just like you” (12). She was the only one “with a clear judgement” who “tried to save what could be saved”, but in the meantime Gergely was left “as an orphan” and thus “became the paschal lamb” (12), the scapegoat. After his slightly superfluous and didactic explanation, the Glass-Eyed Tót leaves in the direction of the synagogue, and Gergely realizes, while walking to his friend’s place, that the village is just a demolished, decaying, desolate rural area, where looking around is simply unpleasant—perhaps it has never been a pleasant experience. A few minutes later, upon hearing that the diary is in fact empty, he introduces himself as Gergely Klein. This gesture of accepting faith as an orphan and symbolically as Jewish gains a moral dimension: the only ethical choice one can make in this world, where anyone, an individual, a community or a race can be blamed and punished for the sins of others.

V.5 Personal Exorcism

As opposed to the other two novels discussed previously, in *Welcome* there is no redemption for the community and for those who stay; only for the one who leaves. In case of Gergely, his pursuit for identity can be called a successful quest, and in the end he emerges as a new person, with a newly forged and specifically chosen identity. He does not see the shadows on the wall anymore, which means that at once he has become an outsider and also lost his delusions regarding the village. He does not see the magical occurrences anymore because he does not need them: he has finally accepted his life as such, and he can truthfully face his past and history, without the need to belong to his place of 'birth'.

On the other hand, the community has not changed at all. Although there was a possibility for change, when Metz read out the Klein diary, in which ultimately everyone could read or hear whatever they wanted, in the end it also did not change the status quo in the village. Thus, the reading out functions as a failed ritual: women "stood around like a spare prick at a wedding, or as if they repeated the moves of a fertility dance, forbidden but known by everyone"; men were "moving more soberly, as if they were tied by their own authority" (6). All are excited, but none are impatient, though they have to wait for long. A storm

is coming, but no one seems scared; as Metz saw from above, “bodies were pressed together, and old lovers, who hadn’t even greeted each other for ten years, stole kisses” (6). Thus, it is described as a special moment, in which old resentments are forgotten, everyone likes the other, and people wait for something significant to happen in a trance-like state. After the event, Metz confesses that it was the best half an hour of his life: reading the text to the “enchanted, enraptured and transcended mass”, as this was an event “that will be talked about even after generations have passed”; hence he has become “part of the written and perpetual past”, a “worthy depositary of original time” (6).

Perhaps Metz becomes deified at that time, or it is only the delusion of Gergely and his friends. However, eventually Metz has to fall as well. Already when Gergely leaves, he realizes that a penetrating, rotten smell is radiating from his friend: not from his clothes, but “directly from his body” (10). And even before that, when Gergely studies in Feketeváros and visits his friend in his curious home, the hairdresser’s abandoned for a while, he notices something strange: nothing changes in the room, and there are “no signs of the passing time at all”. No notes on calendars; nothing “which could prove” that while Gergely is away, “there was yesterday here too, and not only the days” he “supervise[s] exist; the weekends [he] starts with [his] presence” (7). Literally nothing changes, and the lack of movement is the only characteristic of the

room; not even cobwebs or dirt change place. Obviously, as Gergely always observes everything through his own very limited perspective, this lack of time signifies most importantly how time in the village differs from linear, passing time, and how it starts to trouble Gergely. But it also suggests that the life of Metz is too closed, too permanent and unchangeable, while the smell signals his eventual decay. When he calls Gergely, Metz is already in the final stage of alcoholism, and he is also diagnosed as schizophrenic, which suddenly gives a logical explanation of him being a medium: it is only a hallucination—or at least from the perspective of doctors, who stand for rationality, his gift for communicating with the dead is nothing else than the result of a mental illness.

Besides Metz, there is no salvation for the others either. Apart from Gergely's friends, the unsuccessful artist Bece and Franczek, who commits suicide, the rest of the village remains unchanged in its decay. There are no signs of any improvements; there are no happy faces: only hatred and suspicion, especially regarding Gergely and his return. The author's judgement on the village and Hungarian countryside in general is condemning and pessimistic: there is no hope, only if someone leaves the community behind.

As already discussed, the only way to process (collective) trauma is talking about it, or writing about it; the important thing is to be able to verbalize and face the original traumatic event. Several writers publish their straight to

the point and faithful recollections, such as the narratives of Tim O'Brian regarding the war in Vietnam, or the Hungarian Elaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War: Hungary 1944-1945*. Naturally, in case of writers of literature, creating a fictive reconstruction that only partially resembles the author's own experience, perhaps only in its main problem or theme can work as a cure as well. For instance, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* or Pak Wan-seo's *Naked Tree* are quite obviously the authors' own fictive accounts of the Second World War and the Korean War, respectively; they were most probably also struggling to find a way of sharing their own traumatic memories, and by doing so, making a sense of what happened to them. As for *Welcome*, too, the novel was admittedly created at least partly due to GreCsó's persecution following the scandal caused by his first prose *Gossip Mom*, where he experienced being rejected and ostracized in the community he belonged to since his birth. Suddenly, from someone who was looked down upon by the majority because of his father, then became somewhat respected due to his academic success, he became an enemy and a scapegoat. Thus, it was easy for him to find similarities between his and Viktor Klein's exclusion from the village, and he chose Gergely as a kind of alter ego for himself, whose life is irrevocably linked with the banished Klein. The biographical accordance with the author's life also supports the fact that GreCsó has creatively employed his own experience in

creating Gergely's character, while also intending to observe the process of how easily a community excludes their members and how such a close-knit community works in general. Therefore, the narrative can be read as his self-treatment through the symbol of the orphaned, excluded Jewish boy, in which sense *Welcome* is both a personal exorcism of the author and his protagonist, and in both cases it proves to be a successful pursuit.

For Gergely, being abandoned by his parents is also a traumatic event he wants to repress and deny. He lives his life in the village constantly pretending to be someone else, mentioning the orphans living in the castle which used to be the inheritance of Aunt Pannika in a derogatory way: as miserable, rootless people he has nothing in common with. By doing so, he shares the collective scorn of the villagers (similarly to how the community in *Beloved* occasionally participate in the racist discourse of the dominant culture), trying desperately to become one of them. Ultimately, he fails, but even after his escape from Sáraság for years he is unable to remember his own individual trauma. Visiting the village helps him to come to terms with his past and his inheritance: he finally remembers his childhood, verbalizes the original traumatic event and also the collective trauma of the Holocaust, the following blood libel and the scapegoating of Ede Klein, and accepts his place as an outsider in the

community. In the end, he has a chance to grow as a person who is able to change: he is unstuck in time, as opposed to his friends.

However, the community is portrayed as cruel, too hierarchic and rigid, too closed and suffocating to change. Thus, Gergely is the only one who is saved, and saved by leaving the community behind. In a community like the one depicted, where anyone can be ostracized and victimized without real reasons; where anyone can meet the fate of Job or Azazel, the first scapegoat, and be blamed while innocent; where no one can be different from the community's norms without its repercussions the only moral choice one has is to side with the disinherited and rejected, the true victims of history. This is why choosing to be Jewish takes upon an ethical dimension in the narrative, and also choosing to tell the story of the original Viktor Klein is, sadly, the only action possible to at least lessen the wrongdoings of society.

After individual or collective trauma, the denial and repression of the traumatic event is the normal human reaction, both on a social and an individual level. However, according to Grecsó, similarly to Hwang Sok-yong and Toni Morrison, people have a responsibility to understand the past, but not for the knowledge itself: rather, in order to be able to connect with the present and reclaim the possibility of a future. All three writers believe that those whom they represent, that is, Hungarians, Koreans, and African-Americans,

respectively, are somehow lost in history, stuck in time, and in order to move forward and have a meaningful future which matters, they need to understand their past first to understand their present place in history and the world. As for Hungarians, they need to stop only remembering History until the First World War, which was the end of glory for their Empire: they have to let go of the triumphant past and need to stop pretending as the only victims of history. They have to admit their part in the Holocaust instead of blaming solely the Germans for all the atrocities committed as well as facing the truths of the Socialist regime, which changed the country permanently. In like manner, which is also emphasized in all of GreCsó's narratives, individuals need to discover their roots and their family histories, and they need to actively engage with their inheritance instead of ignoring it in hope of a better future, which is based on the total erasure of the past. The past can never be completely obliterated, and if a person or a society collectively make an effort to negate it, then their world will only be filled with ghosts, refusing to rest in their graves until the past is not reclaimed.

VI. Conclusion

As it can be seen from the previous chapters, the main themes of the three narratives are quite similar: the impossibility of continuing one's life in a meaningful way without confronting the past; the necessity of facing and reclaiming both the individual's and the community's past; the reconstruction of said past and the possibility of forging a new individual and collective identity through commemoration. While in *Beloved* and *The Guest* this process is facilitated by ghosts, in *Welcome* ghosts are only part of the several magical occurrences all pointing to the reemergence of the repressed or dissociated past. However, what is true in all novels is that "magic is engendered by the pain of history" (Faris 62), thus the magical in all narratives is interwoven with a specific historical trauma. Also, in all novels the fate of the individual is closely connected with that of the community. Ritual, folkloristic tradition, and in general residual elements of culture are also central in these works, just like the harmful influence of forced foreign ideologies or foreign oppression, especially in *Beloved* and *The Guest*. In addition, due to the experience of collective trauma, collective and individual identity are in crisis in all three novels.

What Schudder points out concerning Morrison's work is true for *The Guest* and *Long Time No See* as well: "*Beloved* may be unique in using the

ghost story to shock its readers into locating the source of horror not in mysteries beyond this world, but rather in the repressed and unclaimed realities of the factual, historical past” (415). In this sense, ghosts are the perfect incarnation of the traumatic past: just as “[f]olk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told” (Herman 1), traumatic events cannot be buried and denied for long; communities cannot—and should not—be silenced regarding historical traumas forever. Therefore, ghosts have to be conjured up in order to be released and forgotten, even though they can never be expelled completely, which theme is addressed by Morrison at the end of *Beloved*. First, some common features of the three novels will be briefly examined regarding their narrative structure (temporal-spatial characteristics), language use and how identity is problematized in all of them, then the major differences will be discussed.

As all three novels share several common characteristics of trauma narratives, they inevitably have similar narrative structures as well. Also, from the perspective of magical realism, our understanding of time as linear is certainly disrupted by the constant mixing of different time frames caused by the haunting quality of past traumatic events. Therefore, in all three texts the same events resurface again and again, and the primary traumatic experiences

of the main characters are not elaborated on until the latter part of the novels⁴⁴, but instead they are frequently alluded to, and there are several repetitions on the linguistic level as well. Also, the linear timeline of the narratives is inevitably always disrupted by the overwhelming past embodied by ghosts, and the major characters are portrayed as prisoners of their own respective memories. This results in the impossibility of living in the present facing the future, hence the present is both loaded and intertwined with the past. In addition, the place of the novels is always isolated and connected to the past traumas as well, which is precisely why returning to them is necessary (in *The Guest* and *Welcome* the major characters literally have to return, while in *Beloved* the protagonist never leaves, and the primary scene of trauma is reenacted at the exact same place⁴⁵). The places are also both magical and real at the same time: the footprints of giants can be seen in the Azazal Street in *Welcome*, the house of Sethe is haunted by her past and it expels male visitors, and the Some Farm becomes the sacred place of a shamanic ritual initiated by the appearance of a Christian minister. Still, all places portrayed exist in reality and they are connected to real historical events that continue to haunt present generations.

⁴⁴ In this respect, trauma narratives are similar to detective stories, which is exploited in *Welcome*.

⁴⁵ It should be added though that Sweet Home and even the slave ships are also important places of primary trauma, addressed in the novel through Sethe's rememories and *Beloved's* monologue.

In order to face the traumatic events, their recalling and reconstruction is necessary. All three authors would agree with Yosöp's grandmother that "a man needs to understand where he comes from in order to be truly human" (44), and in order to understand, first an honest confrontation with the repressed or dissociated memories is inevitable. This confrontation is facilitated by the magical aspects of the novels, and that is precisely how magical realism and trauma coincide. Also, this reconstruction is always both a very personal process (using Sethe, Yosöp and Gergely as focalizers) and a collective act: all the traumatic events recounted in the novels are real historical incidents that have influenced the collective identity of African Americans, Koreans and Hungarians today. Remembering the collective experience of trauma is shown as a subversive act in all three works, most overtly in *The Guest*, where the truth is radically different from the official narrative of North Korea regarding the civilian massacre. However, although more subtly, official history and 'petite histoire' are also portrayed as entirely different in *Beloved* and *Welcome* as well. In *Beloved*, what history as such has preserved is not the reality of everyday life from an African American perspective; while in *Welcome*, the small narratives are in the center of the novel as opposed to the false grand narrative of Hungary, written by an oppressive regime.

As a consequence, there are some similarities regarding language use in the three novels as well. Most importantly, they all rely on oral discourse and intend to resurrect and preserve the regional or ethnic dialects and use of language. This is of paramount importance in order to portray the traumatic event faithfully, and makes it possible to read the divergent voices in the texts as testimonies. Naturally, there are differences as well in this respect: *The Guest* employs the mode of testimony the most clearly through its shamanic ritual, by which all the major characters are able to relay their own personal experiences using first person narration. Although in the third person, in *Beloved* there are also testimonies from several characters, as Morrison uses different focalizers in her novel; while *Welcome* focuses on one character, and he is the one through whom the regional characters and their language is revived. From this respect, *Welcome* offers the least faithful testimonies, as everything is filtered through the narrator's peculiar character, who is far from reliable.

In addition, borrowing Bakhtin's term, all novels employ polyphonic narration. Again, *The Guest* is the clearest example, where both the perpetrators and their victims have an opportunity to share their perspective and views by means of the magical element in the novel. Also, it is important to state that their lives are understood as unavoidably interwoven by Hwang, who elaborates this theme even more in *Princess Bari*. There, Bari is bound by her hatred, and

can only gain her freedom through forgiving those who have wronged her. Also, her enemies cannot be free until they are not forgiven, and the ultimate reason for human suffering is the “desire to live better than others” (232), which makes people cruel to each other. This vicious cycle (borrowed from Buddhism) is alluded to in *The Guest* as well, when Yohan is advised by Yosöp to “pray to God for forgiveness. Then the dead, too, will be able to close their eyes in peace” (24). In other words, Hwang portrays both sides in order to show that are in fact no sides at all: to be free and reach salvation, the characters need to understand that everyone is equally wrong or right, guilty or innocent.

On the other hand, polyphony is more restricted in the other two novels. Morrison focuses on African Americans, and although Amy Denver is certainly an important character, she is only portrayed through the eyes of Sethe. Also, Mr. Garner, Bodwin and schoolteacher remain much less elaborated characters. Still, through different members of the community different voices—and different interpretations of Sethe’s deed—are included in the novel. Similarly, *Welcome* is quite effective in evoking several voices and different tones through its anecdotic structure, but the continuous presence of Gergely’s voice and his interpretation of the events unavoidably color the stories he decides to remember.

Identity is also always problematic in trauma narratives, and the three novels discussed are no exception: all their protagonists have to struggle in order to forge an independent identity. In addition, in accordance with how magical realism oftentimes portrays characters with multiple or fluid identities, in the three novels as well identities are far from stable. The boundaries of them are particularly uncertain in *Beloved*, where the identities of the three female characters of Sethe, Beloved and Denver merge, but also in *The Guest* Yosŏp as a shaman is possessed by his brother, who literally moves into his body, and in *Welcome* the shadows of the ancestors can stick to people, destabilizing their individual identities. Naturally, this feature is also connected to the traumatic events the novels chose to narrate.

In case of *Beloved*, Sethe is traumatized due to her race and gender, and these two factors are portrayed as indistinguishable from each other in case of other characters as well (Denver, Baby Suggs, Ella, Sethe's mother, etc.), with a special emphasis on maternal love and either its lack or its excess. Still, slavery is portrayed as equally destructive for men (Paul D, Halle, Stamp Paid, etc.), who become unable to perform the role of lover, husband and father, and the white masters as well, who need their slaves in order to measure themselves against others and who gain self-confidence and pride as superior human beings by in fact degrading themselves morally as a result. Thus, ultimately it is the

system of slavery and the collective trauma it has caused which causes a fracture, and which is an inheritance that has to be remembered in order to conjure away, according to Morison.

On the other hand, in *The Guest* the collective trauma of a civil war has caused a deep wound for people on both sides. Survival itself naturally entails “survivor guilt” (Herman 53), and all the more so after a war where people from the same nation turned against each other in the name of foreign ideologies as excuses for their old resentments. What is more, the official narrative created by both sides has made it utterly impossible to process the collective trauma of the war. Hwang’s message is clear: only collective remembrance, forgiveness, and finally unification can solve the identity crisis of both Koreas, and until people let themselves be deceived by the dominant discourse and do not mourn the past, they will not have an independent identity either, and no future.

In *Welcome*, if understood in a broader sense, the Soviet era is responsible for a generation’s lack of willpower and its fatherlessness by silencing people and making real communication impossible, thus robbing the new generation from their inheritance: their family histories. Moreover, the tragedy of the Holocaust has never been addressed properly during the Soviet era. According to Kertész, who states that the Holocaust has become part of an

all-encompassing European mythology, it was impossible to face its inheritance, because “facing it would entail introspection, introspection would induce catharsis, and that would result in ... intellectually joining Europe. However, the dictatorship aimed at disunity and its perpetuation, as it served its goals” (79). In the end, the only chance for the protagonist is to leave the doomed community behind, where there is no real trust and sympathy between its members as a result of the collective trauma of the Holocaust and the destructive effect of an oppressive regime.

Consequently, in all novels the magical element is used to force both the individual and the community to face individual and collective past, remember it and choose a future actively instead of living locked in the past, whereas choosing a future necessarily means forging an identity after it was fractured due to the experience of collective trauma. In addition, *The Guest* and *Beloved* employ African American and Korean traditions and mythology to support their magic and offer means of survival, while *Welcome* utilizes folk wisdom and local anecdotes as the foundation of its supernatural occurrences. Thus, what Foreman points out as the characteristic of Morrison’s magic realism, that is, that “her own amplified reality” is “solidly rooted in the world of African Americans, in black cultural traditions”, and her fantastic world is closely connected to “cultural and communal traditions” (299), can be also stated about

Hwang's novel: it is clearly rooted in Korean folklore, and also connected to cultural and communal traditions. If Morrison uses magical realism "to strengthen generational ties to African American cosmologies and thus offer to a deracinated generation strategies for survival" (Foreman 300), the same is true about Hwang's usage of shamanism and shamanist exorcism in *The Guest*. However, as opposed to the other two novels, *Welcome* does not offer a general Hungarian mythology that can be relied upon, which is in accordance with its more pessimistic portrayal of the community as such.

Besides local folklore and mythology, all three novels heavily rely upon the Bible as well, but they all appropriate it in different ways to highlight traumatic experience. Morrison uses biblical allusions the most subtly, which is not surprising considering the fact that the Bible was also exploited as a way of justification for slavery and racism, and Christianity for the African Americans living as slaves was a method of comfort that made them gradually forget and abandon their traditional beliefs. Therefore, although Baby Suggs also turns to Christian wisdom from time to time, she mixes it with African American beliefs and her ritual is fundamentally very different from a Christian sermon. She preaches her fellow ex-slaves to love their bodies and not to feel guilt, but rather to grieve for their losses and turn towards a happier future. While according to Christianity all human beings are born with sin, and they need to

repent for forgiveness, in *Beloved* the slaves are portrayed as having been suffered enough, which is emphasized by the name of Stamp Paid as well. Therefore, similarly to how Sethe's deed cannot be judged neither by the community nor by readers, no one has the right to judge others who have suffered as a result of an inhumane oppression. On the other hand, the white master is clearly portrayed as guilty, even though the novel does not dwell upon this issue. Even Mr. Garner is responsible for the degradation his slaves experienced, and although he treats his slaves in a more humane way, it remains a question "how much difference there really was between before schoolteacher and after" (220).

Repentance and forgiveness is an even more central theme in *The Guest*, and, interestingly, the biblical story of Job is used as an explanation both in this novel and *Welcome* as well. To understand trauma from a religious point of view, the seemingly meaningless suffering Job experienced can indeed offer explanation or solace, as the main theme of his book is divine justice and it centers on the problem of why good people have to suffer. Yosöp understands the civil war as a test of faith which they failed (as opposed to Job who succeeded), and for which they need to repent, forgive and ask for forgiveness, and reach a complete trust in God through this process. In addition, Uncle Some points out that everyone is equally guilty, and that the living are responsible for

hearing out the dead, aiding them in their journey to the afterlife, and at last continuing their lives in peace without any traces of past resentment. From this respect, the novel is ultimately a mixture of the ideas of Christianity, Buddhism and Shamanism. Although Hwang's approach is certainly more progressive than blaming the American imperialism or North Korea and Marxism for all wrongdoings, his conclusion is still somewhat oversimplified and not completely in accordance with the text itself: there are clearly differences even between Sangho, Yohan and Pongsu, not to mention Uncle Some or all female characters portrayed in the narrative regarding their alleged sins.

Similarly, in *Welcome* the Book of Job is alluded to as example of undeserved suffering, but instead of divine justice it is connected to the scapegoating process resulting in the expulsion of Klein and the aggression committed against Pannika. That is, although the novel heavily relies upon the Bible as Gergely understands the village through the lens of old scriptures, it certainly does not agree with its most basic premises. Instead of God, the community is blamed for ostracizing its innocent members, and there is no forgiveness for them in the novel: they remain locked in their perpetual punishment as a result of their collective guilt.

Although all texts have different approaches to sin, guilt and punishment, what they have in common is that there are no evident binary

categories of victim and assaulter (after all, several female characters in *Beloved* are portrayed as both victims and assaulters), innocent and guilty, and no real antagonism towards the perpetrators even in *Welcome*. Although Gergely is portrayed as a victim,⁴⁶ he is responsible for deceiving himself all his life, and the only people he feels antagonism to are in fact his friends who only tried to help him. Still, compared to *Welcome* and *Beloved*, where responsibility for the traumatic events is at least less ambiguous (schoolteacher and white masters in general for slavery; those who used Klein as a scapegoat), in *The Guest* no one and everyone is responsible, which is perhaps too general, especially considering the fact that in case of collective trauma, there should be some form of retribution. Still, none of the texts propagate revenge or further victimization, and none portrays resentment or indignation at the end. On the other hand, what is important and in fact the only possibility is the acceptance of the past and retelling it, constructing a narrative out of it, which is why conjuring up the ghosts is inevitable.

A more obvious differences between the novels discussed is the portrayal of gender. Whereas in *Beloved* there is certainly more focus on the female body and female experience, centering around the fact that African American women were (and still are) doubly marginalized by their race and

⁴⁶ As Kertész stated, a totalitarian regime can be best portrayed “from the outside as absurd, and from the inside through the perspective of the victim” (22).

gender, in the other two novels the female characters are a lot less complex than their male counterparts. As already discussed, in *The Guest* the absence of the female victims' voice becomes a lack in the novel itself. (However, similarly to *Beloved*, trauma is actually connected to the female body in this text as well.) The female body becomes the place of male trauma, and its destruction functions as a method of revenge, which in the end also accentuates the ultimate defenseless and powerlessness of women (and children). As opposed to Morrison's text, in *The Guest* women remain as passive sufferers of oppression, violence and humiliation without any will or intention to fight back. The only somewhat strong female character, the great-grandmother of the Ryu brothers, exists in the past, and due to the shift to new, foreign ideologies she too has lost her power. Still, according to this logic at least during the shamanic performance women should regain their voice, which unfortunately does not happen in the text. (From this point of view, another novel by Hwang, *Princess Bari* shares a lot more similarities with Morrison's texts.)

Compared to the other two novels, in *Welcome* females are oddly neglected except for the several highly eroticized episodes, which function as the sexual fantasies of an orphaned teenage boy. The patriarchal notion that in order to have a family and be part of a larger family history, one needs a father, is clearly stated in the narrative numerous times: while mothers provide love for

their children, it is ultimately the father's role to provide a sense of time, that is, the time of the ancestors. Interestingly, this concept is basically the opposite of what Morrison's matrilineal families often depicted in her prose (besides *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, *A Mercy*, etc.) signify. However, in *Welcome* the concept of the father can be also understood as a symbol for an independent state, and in this sense the individual time of the text's major characters is ruptured similarly to the country's time by the Soviet oppression. This reading of the text is supported by the fact that Gergely reclaims his identity and his father at the time when Hungary also reclaims its independence. Although the issue of gender is quite different in *Welcome* than in the other two novels discussed, still, the fact that in the power structure women are subordinated is quite clearly visible here as well.

Turning to the employment of magical realism as a narrative strategy, there are clear differences between the three texts in this regard as well. Although as already discussed, the magic is employed in all three novels to remind its protagonists that the past cannot be simply buried and left behind, mostly through the appearance of ghosts, its usage is quite different in *Welcome* compared to the other two works. First of all, while the supernatural, that is, the presence of the ghost(s) is accepted as perfectly natural in *The Guest* and *Beloved*, Gergely is a typical unreliable narrator, which makes his

reminiscences at least ambiguous. It is quite probable that he has only used his imagination to create a fantastic world covering the unbearable reality, but at the very least, he definitely colored and exaggerated certain events, while eliminated others. Therefore, at first the magical realist elements in the novel seem solely a cunning device to trick the reader—similarly to how Gergely deceives himself—to focus on the amusing incidents and the mysterious diary instead of the gaps in Gergely’s life narrative. However, the magical incidents are in fact all connected to Gergely’s fatherlessness, thus in the end they do function similarly to how in the other two novels they force the individual and the community to face the past. Also, the fact that the novel ends with Gergely announcing his identity that is on a realistic level impossible, but still accepted by the community as natural, and indeed the only logical possibility, again places the novel into the magical realist tradition. Also, magical realism is again used similarly to *Beloved* in the sense that both authors claimed, just like García Márquez, that they had only wanted to faithfully depict their respective communities as they had remembered it.

Another difference between the three novels as magical realist works is the depiction of ghosts. Both in *The Guest* and *Welcome* the ghosts are friendly presences, and especially in *Welcome* they are just like neighbors of the characters, perfectly ordinary members of the community: Avarka is even a

mostly comic figure. On the other hand, they are not directly connected to past atrocities: while *Beloved* is engendered by Sethe's infanticide and the collective experience of slavery, and in *The Guest* the ghosts are all concrete people who died during or, in case of Yohan, after the massacre, in *Welcome* all those who die can stay behind as ghosts. Still, similarly to the other two novels they are the ghost of collective trauma as well in the sense that their presence signifies what Denver and Sethe agree on as well, that "nothing ever dies" (36), and the past will keep haunting people as long as they do not face it. Interestingly, *Beloved* is the only malevolent ghost in the three novels, but she is also portrayed as a victim, and in the end she is the one who stays alone; who, although "has claim", "not claimed" (274) by anyone, and who is rather forgotten than remembered. She is the most complex of the ghosts depicted: as already discussed, her identity is far from clear and cannot be pinned down to one existence, which underlines the fracture in the narrative caused by the traumatic experience as well.

Furthermore, all three authors can be understood as shamans, who use their creative magic in order to initiate an exorcism and aid their respective communities. The act of exorcism necessarily entails the paradox of mourning as well, that is, of conjuring up the ghost only to conjure it away. However, the success of the said exorcism is different in all three works. As Herman explains

from a psychoanalytic point of view, “[t]he goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism” (181), but it is questioned in the works whether such traumatic events can be integrated into collective and individual consciousness at all. In *Beloved*, the ending suggests that it is impossible: the trauma, that is, the ghost is still there, its traces are left behind, and when people decide to forget her, “[t]hey do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and come-back” (Derrida 99). Therefore, although the exorcism scene is successful—both Sethe and the community react differently; Sethe and Denver are reintegrated into the community; there is a new chance to live a meaningful life for the major characters—the future of Sethe remains ambiguous, just like the future of the community: after all, the trace of the past trauma is there somewhere as “a loneliness that roams ... disremembered and unaccounted for” (274). Similarly, the past trauma does not disappear in *Welcome* either: although Gergely is successful in reintegrating his own trauma into his life instead of exorcising or repressing it, other members of the community remain in denial. Finally, *The Guest* is the only novel where the exorcism is shown as completely successful, both for the individual and the community, as exemplified by Yosöp’s dream. However, the official narratives of both sides are still there, and until the atrocities committed on both sides are not acknowledged, mourning and the

reintegration of the traumatic event into the history of Korea cannot happen. Sadly, the ending of the novel remains more of a wish fulfillment than reality.

Overall, all three authors have chosen magical realism as a narrative mode to recount stories of historical trauma in accordance with what Faris named “magical historicity”: works that not only reflect history, but also want to change it “by addressing historical issues critically” (*Ordinary Enchantments* 138). Except Morison, none of the writers are specifically magical realist authors, and Morison also uses elements of magic to varying degrees in her prose, *Beloved* being her only novel that literally rests on the magical (although it is also of central importance in *Song of Solomon*). On the other hand, Hwang uses elements of it solely in *Princess Bari* except for *The Guest*, which is in fact a thematically quite similar novel, but there he broadens his concerns from the two Koreas to the whole world. Also, besides *Welcome Greco* Greco has used fantastic elements only in his second novel *Dance School*, but there they are explained away as drug-induced hallucinations. As the three authors have specifically chosen the narrative mode to recount stories of historical atrocities, it can be concluded that—coming from greatly different cultural and historical contexts— they all seem to agree that ghosts are perfect metaphors for past trauma inasmuch as they embody the haunting quality of it, and that magical

realism is indeed an appropriate narrative mode for reconstructing the past from a different viewpoint, while also offering alternatives for the future.

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Abstract in English

Ghosts of Collective Trauma: Magical Realism and Its Cultural Alterations

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The dissertation analyzes and compares an African American, a Korean, and a Hungarian narrative, each concentrating on both individual and collective trauma and each authors using the techniques of magical realism in these works. It also argues that there is an underlying reason why magical realism is especially appropriate for trauma narratives, and examines how ghosts in all three works are engendered by historical atrocities and past trauma. The three works discussed are *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Guest* (2001) by Hwang Sok-yong, and *Welcome* (2005) by Krisztián Grecsó, and the three fictionalized historical events are the infanticide of Margaret Garner, the Sinch'ŏn massacre during the Korean War, and a blood libel in Hungary after WWII. Thus, in a broader sense the collective traumas portrayed in the works

are slavery, the Korean War, and the Holocaust followed by the Soviet oppression, respectively.

Each chapter has the following structure: the study of the magical element while focusing on the presence of the ghosts; the use of language, with special emphasis on polyphony, orality, and the ideology behind language usage; the representation of time and space; problems of forming a coherent identity; and understanding the narratives as means of an exorcism, intending to conjure away the painful past through evoking and relieving it. The main themes of all three texts are the impossibility of continuing to live one's life in a meaningful way without confronting the past; the necessity of facing and reclaiming both the individual's and the community's past; the reconstruction of said past; and the possibility of forging a new individual and collective identity through commemoration, that is, the conjuration of the ghosts of past trauma.

Keywords: magical realism, trauma, ghost, identity, shaman, *Beloved*, *The Guest*, *Welcome*

Abstract in Korean (초록)

집단적 트라우마의 유령들 - 마술적 사실주의 문화적 변경

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본 논문의 목적은 집단적 트라우마가 마술적 사실주의 소설에서 어떻게 나타나는지를 밝히는 것이다. 트라우마는 문학 작품 속에서 언제나 등장해왔지만, 1990 년대 이후에는 문학 비평 분야에서도 인기를 얻기 시작했다. 특히 전쟁, 홀로코스트, 후기 공산주의(postcommunist) 또는 탈식민 국가의 문학과 관련하여 트라우마 연구가 빈번하게 사용되었다. 또한 1950 년대부터 마술적 사실주의도 전세계적으로 인기를 끌고 있다. 본 논문은 마술적 사실주의가 트라우마를 묘사하기 위해서 타당한 서술상의 태도라는 전제에 입각하여 작성되었다.

본 논문의 목적은 아프리카계 미국인, 한국인과 헝가리인의 서사를 분석하며 비교하는 것이다. 각각의 텍스트는 개인 및 집단적 트라우마에 집중하고 각 작가는 자기의 작품에서 마술적 사실주의의 형식을 사용했다. 또한, 각각의 작품에는 유령들이 나타난다. 여기서 유령은 결국 피해자가 직면해야만 할 억압된 과거의 완벽한 은유이다. 본 논문에서 검토하게 될 소설들에서도 유령은 과거의 부활을 의미하며 공동체의 집단적인 트라우마와 연결되어 있다.

이 논문에서 다루는 세 작품은 그레초 크리스티안의 『환영』, 토니 모리슨의 『빌러비드』 그리고 황석영의 『손님』이다. 이들 작품에서 집단적 트라우마의 세 가지 예로 노예제도, 6.25 전쟁, 그리고 홀로코스트가 나타난다. 마술적 사실주의의 정의와 트라우마의 특성에 따라, 각각의 소설들은 다음과 같은

항목들을 중심으로 분석될 것이다: 마술적 요소, 소설의 특수한 언어, 서술의 시공간, 정체성의 문제, 그리고 마지막으로 소설을 개인 및 공동체에게 한 속죄의식으로 이해하는 것이다.

세 소설의 주요 주제는 다음과 같다: 과거를 직면하지 않고는 자신의 생활을 의미있게 지속하는 것이 불가능함, 개인과 공동체의 과거를 직면하고 되찾을 필요성, 되찾은 과거의 재구성, 그리고 트라우마 사건의 공유를 통한 치유의 가능성 제시이다. 이들 작품에서 정화의 과정은 유령에 의해서 촉진된다. 세 편의 소설은 공통적으로 마술적 요소의 일환으로 다중시점을 활용한다. 이는 공식적인 역사를 거부하고 과거를 재구성하기 위해 사용한 서술 방식이다. 또한, 마술적 요소는 민속적 전통에 근거한 것으로 외국 이데올로기의 강제적인 유입과 외국에 의한 억압의 해로운 영향을 작품에서 보여주는 사례다. 게다가 이들은 트라우마적 사건을 묘사한 서사이기 때문에, 앞서 살펴본 소설들에서 과거는 항상 현재를 침입하며 트라우마의 경험을 제대로 직면하기 전까지 미래로의 이행을 불가능하게 만든다. 또한 개인의 운명과 미래가 공동체와 밀접하게 연결되어 있으며, 집단적 트라우마의 경험으로 인해 개인 정체성과 집단 정체성 모두가 위기에 처한다.

주제어: 마술적 사실주의, 트라우마, 유령, 정체성,
무당, 『빌러비드』, 『손님』, 『환영』